

Saipan Tribune

CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

Volume XIV, Issue No. 128

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INSIDE



Biba San Jose!

Tinian's 2004 San Jose Fiesta turned out to be exactly what the organizers hoped—a resounding success.

Page 11



1/2 Discount

Want a return from your purchase? One-Half Discount Store, a supermarket on Middle Road, Gualo Rai, claims to be the only supermarket on-island to literally give back 15 percent of a customer's purchases.

Page 16



Ashley Twins

Sometimes two of a kind beats a "Full House." Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen proved that by topping their childhood stint on that saccharine sitcom by starting a billion-dollar enterprise of direct-to-video movies, a little girl fashion line, and assorted books, dolls, trinkets and doodads.

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Some retirees want their jobs back

NMIRF wary of potential for 'double dipping'

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

Government retirees are seeking exemptions from re-employment restrictions to be able to return to government service.

Members of the NMI Retirement Fund board said yesterday that at least two retirees were granted the exemption last month. They included Victor Lifoi-foi and Miriam Seman.

Yesterday, three more names were set for the board's discussion and eventual approval: Juan L. Babauta, Monica Lizama, and Jose R. Bermudez.

These retirees have reportedly been approved for exemption by Gov. Juan N. Babauta.

Authorities said exemptions for the re-employment of government retirees require the governor's approval, except for teachers, doctors, nurses, and other professionals.

Details on the exemption for the three retirees, however, were not made public during yesterday's board meeting.

Fund administrator Karl T. Reyes and legal counsel Marlon Sarmiento suggested that the issue be reserved for the executive session.

During the meeting, board member Bertha Deleon Guerrero indicated that the approval of the other retirees need not be treated as a separate case from last month.

"We've been doing this to other retir-

See **SOME** on Page 8



WOUNDED IN BATTLE

Lance Cpl. Randy Johnson, center, arrives on Saipan for a 30-day medical leave after being injured in a mine explosion while conducting routine patrol in Iraq. Johnson, who is with the U.S. Marines, sustained injuries. He received a Purple Heart medal for his bravery. Here, he poses for a photo while being taken out of the Saipan International Airport's arrival area after arriving on Saipan yesterday morning. Also in picture are Al Johnson, left; Tina Johnson, center; and Frances Johnson. Randy was warmly welcomed by his family and other officers of the Commonwealth Ports Authority.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



Ex-Customs exec faces child porn charges

By JOHN RAVELO
REPORTER

Federal authorities yesterday launched a campaign against child pornography in the Marianas, following the filing of criminal charges against a former Customs officer who was caught in possession of pornographic materials involving children.

U.S. Attorney Leonardo Rapadas urged

the public to provide the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Postal Inspections Service any information about cases involving child pornography in the CNMI and in Guam.

Fifty-four-year-old Crispin A. Taitano, owner of the Cue Time pool hall, bar and game room on Rota, faces charges of receipt of child pornography and six counts of possession of child pornography. Vid-

eotapes and a DVD disc on child porn were allegedly caught in his possession.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jamie D. Bowers indicted at Taitano at the U.S. District Court. He denied the charges. The court set Taitano's trial to begin on July 6 and denied him bail.

Bowers alleged that Taitano received five VHS videotapes and a DVD that

See **EX-CUSTOMS** on Page 8

CDA says Gateway financing is a dead issue

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

As far as the Commonwealth Development Authority's board of directors is concerned, the Northern Marianas College's proposed financing for its Pacific Gateway project is now dead.

"It's over. We did what we had to do. We couldn't go any further. This issue is

now dead," said CDA board chair Sixto Igisomar in an interview yesterday.

He said the CDA board has no plans to revive the issue in the near future "unless there is a new notice."

Igisomar said that he has foreseen the situation that the Gateway project is in now.

The NMC Board of Regents decided last week to put the project on hold and

to shut down the operations of the La Fiestra complex for lack of budget and amid accreditation concerns.

Igisomar noted that based on previous consultations with the NMC, he already sensed that "there seems to be an issue within themselves."

"Basically, I don't like making decisions on issues that are conflicting at the

See **CDA** on Page 8

Babauta remains vocal vs PTI

By JOHN RAVELO
REPORTER

Even if the parties in the Verizon sale negotiations have already reached a settlement that is waiting to be consummated, Gov. Juan N. Babauta remains vocal over his opposition to the transfer of Verizon's local operations to Pacific Telecom Inc.

Babauta vowed to break Verizon's monopoly in the telecommunications industry through continued opposition to the transfer of Verizon's local ownership from Micronesian Telecommunications Corp. to a lone company, PTI. He said PTI should not be allowed to exclusively own Verizon's fiber optic cable.

See **BABAUTA** on Page 8

DPS backs eliminating gun accidents

By SHAN SEMAN
REPORTER

As part Gun Safety Month activities, the Department of Public Safety has begun distributing gun locks to registered firearm owners in hopes of eliminating gun-related accidents in the CNMI.

The distribution, which is being done in collaboration with federal agencies and gun and safety advocates, began last Wednesday at the Multi-Purpose Center on Saipan and concludes today on Rota.

Distribution at the Songsong Police Station will be from 9am to noon. Another will be held from 1:30pm to 3:30pm at the Sinapalo Police Station. Distribution for Tinian was held yesterday.

Department of Public Safety commissioner Edward Camacho said the distribution is part of Project Child Safe, a federally funded program.

“The goal is to reduce and eventually eliminate gun accidents involving children,” he said. “Although I don’t think we have had any fatal acci-

dents involving children playing with firearms, we don’t want to wait for negative incidents to occur before starting this program. We are proactive and want to prevent these kind of accidents from happening here in the CNMI.”

Firearm related offenses increased from eight in 2001 and 2002 to 14 in 2003.

Camacho said owners of registered firearms would be issued locks for each gun free of charge.

“If a person has 20 firearms, he or she will be issued 20

locks,” he said.

U.S. Attorney for Guam and the Northern Marianas Leonardo Rapadas said the program focuses on promoting firearm safety.

Rapadas said the program is a part of the Project Safe Neighborhoods initiated by the Department of Justice.

“This project involves federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. It combats gun violence. There are different ways of dealing with them, and each state models their approach depending on what type of crimes they face.”

The initiative, announced by President Bush and Attorney General John Ashcroft, seeks to commit \$558 million over two years to reduce gun violence.

Rapadas said about 5,000

locks were available for distribution on Guam, and a portion was used for the distribution in the CNMI.

“The CNMI has not received locks yet, and I felt that we needed to begin distributing them around, so I took some from the ones for Guam and brought them over,” he said. “If this program can save at least one life, then it is well worth it.”

He said locks cost between \$15 to \$35 apiece. The locks are designed to prevent loading a bullet to the barrel of a gun.

Assisting with distribution were Salome Blas of the U.S. Attorney’s Office and Lucille Guerrero of the Victims Advocate Reaching Out program, a media outreach partner of the Attorney’s Office.

Before receiving the locks, re-

cipients were required to supply their identification, firearm registration, village of residency, number of adults in the household, and number of minors in the household.

Also on hand for demonstration of proper use and assembly of the locks was DPS Range Master Ambrose Ogomoro.

Blas and Guerrero said that 54 locks were issued after the first 20 minutes of distribution on Saipan. About 600 were distributed on Guam last month, with 200 issued in the first 20 minutes.

There are a total of 1,990 registered firearms in the CNMI, with 1,660 on Saipan, 222 on Rota, and 108 on Tinian.

Gov. Juan N. Babauta signed a proclamation last April 22, declaring Gun Safety Month.

ACE
+RED

DIABETES
+GREEN

NIKKO

CARS UNLIMITED

cb cruz

lottery

CENTURY
TRAVEL

POINTS OF VIEW

Who is your favorite teacher and why?

Mr. [Andrew] Masga. He is very kind to me and I think he is the best teacher.

Marvin Bisanen,
6th Grade Koblerville Elementary School



Mr. [Andrew] Masga because he is kind to all my classmates and makes us learn and have fun.

Judge Tkel,
6th Grade Koblerville Elementary School



Mrs. [Elizabeth] Mendiola. She's very good to us and she really helps me and my classmates learn.

Esther William,
3rd Grade Koblerville Elementary School



Mrs. [Alice] Taman, because she is kind and has a fun way of teaching. I have fun learning in her class.

Tracy Pelep,
3rd Grade Koblerville Elementary School



Ms. Stacy [San Nicolas], because she has been with us since the start of the school year and she's very nice and kind.

Sidney Villegas,
3rd Grade William S. Reyes Elementary School



Ms. Stacy [San Nicolas], because she teaches us a lot of stuff.

Kelly Demapan,
3rd Grade William S. Reyes Elementary School



Ms. Rita [Carreon], because she's very kind and she likes to teach us and make us play.

Kershey Villegas,
3rd Grade William S. Reyes Elementary School



Ms. Rita [Carreon], because she helps me learn and is nice to me. She is also kind.

Julius Padilla,
3rd Grade William S. Reyes Elementary School



FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF APRIL 30, 2004											
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434 workers not eligible for transfer

Over 400 garment class suit workers are no longer entitled to seek transfer relief in the CNMI after failing to show up at the Department of Labor for a number of times.

Their names are now with the Attorney General’s Office—Division of Immigration for voluntary repatriation or deportation proceedings.

DOL said it believes that the workers are in the Commonwealth “without having transferred to new employers.” Their stay is considered illegal, which means that they can be arrested anytime by immigration officers.

The department has the list

of their names but the agency refused to release it citing confidentiality.

DOL hearing officer Linn Asper, in an April 28 administrative order, approved the department’s motion to refer the list to Immigration.

He also granted the department’s motion not to make the list public, as negotiated by lawyer Mark Hanson, who represented some of the workers.

Asper said, though, that the order should not be interpreted to be a bar or restriction on the AGO from using the information in carrying out its duties.

The hearing office held its final

hearing on the case on April 21 but neither workers nor their legal representatives showed up. The department also waited for them on April 23 but had the same result.

DOL had given the workers deadline extension to present themselves so that they can be absorbed back in the garment manufacturing industry.

The workers, who earlier joined a class suit against 28 garment manufacturers under the Fair Labor Standards Act, were given temporary work authorizations following their case settlement last year.

The lawsuit resulted in a \$20-million settlement in July last year. *(Liberty Dones)*

Senators wrangle over CUC’s old power plant

By EDITH G. ALEJANDRO
REPORTER

Majority of the Senate refused to pass a resolution that called for the closure of the Puerto Rico power plant, saying that cessation of operation could be made without it.

After a heated debate on Senate Resolution 14-18 during Wednesday’s session, the Senate decided to toss back the measure to the Committee on Public Utilities, Transportations, and Communications for further discussion.

The resolution would have called for the closure of the power plant due to environmental concerns and failure to meet certain Environmental Protection Agency requirements.

Sen. Paul Manglona, however, expressed apprehension on the content of the resolution, noting that an audit is also being proposed.

“I don’t understand this, if we want the power plant to stop operation, why do we have to ask the Office of the Public Auditor to conduct a thorough audit? This is an environmental concern,” said the senator.

The Puerto Rico power plant has been a source of concern among Puerto Rico residents, who say it is noisy, environmentally risky and increases the health risks in the community.

Gov. Juan N. Babauta earlier asked the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. to study the feasibility of relocating the Puerto Rico Power Plant IV after receiving a

petition from 23 Precinct 3 residents, including some lawmakers, that asked him to relocate the plant as soon as possible. The plant, which was privatized in the early 1990s, consists of five generators.

Last year, the CUC said the plant is having “extensive difficulties with its production program,” resulting in power outages that affected the northern part of Saipan: Tanapag, Marpi, As Matuis, Capitol Hill, Papago, and Kagman.

CUC executive director Lorraine A. Babauta, in an earlier report to the board, noted that the generation plant was not running at full capacity, and that “our coop-privatization partners are still running quite below contract specifications.”

BABY NEWS

marianas lottery

Opinion

Saipan Tribune

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AP The Associated Press

Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

Timeout on overtime rule

Overtime pay makes ends meet for many U.S. workers. But the federal regulations that determine who merits overtime are so complex that employers and employees end up in court way too often. Unfortunately, the new Labor Department overtime rule intended to clear things up just makes them murkier. A timeout is called for, if just to figure out who the winners and losers really are.

An earlier version of the new rule drew 80,000 comments from befuddled workers and employers alike. The final rule published in April—though a clear improvement—has provoked outright argument about what some of its provisions really mean.

Labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao maintains that, when the rule takes effect in four months, it will guarantee overtime protection to workers earning less than \$23,660 a year and strengthen overtime rights for 6.7 million other American workers, including 1.3 million low-wage, white-collar workers who previously didn't qualify. Workers, though, aren't taking Chao's word for it.

Despite Chao's assurances that she's worked hard to "get it right," the National Assn. of Police Organizations determined that "while many police are protected, others are not."

A former Department of Labor investigator last week told a House committee that ambiguous wording threatens protection now afforded to many workers—including nursery school teachers, nurses, chefs, team leaders, outside sales people and financial service employees—who earn from \$23,660 to \$100,000 a year.

American workers have fueled recent productivity gains but failed to share in the newly created wealth because, as Alan Greenspan recently told the Senate, "virtually all of the gains in productivity ended up in rising profit."

The economy isn't spinning off jobs quickly enough to get the unemployed back to work, and young workers are frustrated by a minimum wage that hasn't budged since 1997. A panic about their overtime is the last thing workers need, even though the regulations surely do need some straightening out.

Rather than take Chao's word, Congress should order the Labor Department to delay implementation of the complex overtime regulations until everyone knows what really will happen to workers' paychecks. Get a think tank on the job.

Replacing one flawed set of regulations with another won't diminish lawsuits and may allow unscrupulous employers to take advantage of more workers. As Chao has noted, key portions of the rule hadn't been changed in more than 50 years. A few more weeks isn't going to matter.

(c) 2004, Los Angeles Times



The Japanese suffer high cost for living on a short leash

By MICHAEL ZIELENZIGER

SPECIAL TO THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

When three Japanese hostages released in Iraq last month returned home, they were greeted not with garlands of flowers, prayers of thanksgiving and applause from strangers for their manifest courage, but with stony stares and accusations of disobedience.

Their cruel reception shocked many Westerners. The two young aid workers and the freelance photographer were vilified for defying Japan's mighty bureaucrats and venturing on their own into a chaotic landscape scarred by war. The government even demanded reimbursement for the flight home.

Now these former hostages are hiding in their own homes and making apologies to society for "causing trouble"—after being held at knifepoint. Such behavior reflects a reality hidden behind the shoji screens of modern Japan. This is a society that doesn't tolerate difference or dissent and punishes it when it appears.

In fact, more than 1 million young Japanese adults have chosen to lock themselves up in their own homes rather than endure the coercion that informs Japan's collective society. Many would rather sit in their rooms reading, playing video games or drinking than expose themselves to ostracism for being "out of the ordinary."

The syndrome these young adults suffer from, known in Japanese as hikikomori, is seldom discussed in polite society and only recently has been recognized as a disorder by Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. These young adults do not suffer from a psychological disease, like schizophrenia or agoraphobia. Hikikomori is a social disorder that psychiatrists who have studied it believe exists only in Japan's unyielding culture.

These psychiatrists agree that these young adults, 80 percent of them men, are prisoners of the rigidities that bind modern Japan. Conformity, fear of risk-taking and reprisals for dissent keep their insular nation outwardly placid and "trouble free" yet constrains its ability to adapt and adjust to a changing world. Like the returning hostages, these hikikomori often suffer from symptoms of post-traumatic stress after enduring harassment and hostility from co-workers, classmates and strangers.

For centuries, Japanese have been raised to follow Confucian doctrines of filial piety, loyalty and fealty to the group. The Japanese still reject the principles of universalism and individualism: that everyone should be treated the same even though each of us is different. Among Japanese, you are either part of the group or a total stranger.

A drive for material success motivates, but altruism and civil society remain drastically undernourished. Indeed, many Japanese find it difficult to understand why anyone would go to Iraq to help feed strangers; Japan's growing ranks of homeless are usually fed

by Christians of ethnic Korean descent, and charity, as Westerners define it, is virtually unknown.

In today's Japan, being different is often dangerous. An individual more intelligent or creative than others is subject to bullying and cruel harassment from others in the group. As one hikikomori told me, "To survive in Japan's economic society, I'd have to kill off my insides, my own original voice."

In American society, young adults who seek unique and unusual ways to express their individualism and unleash their creative energies might be starting software companies. Westerners are raised to believe they should "stand on their own two feet," take risks, lead others and think for themselves.

Japanese, by contrast, live in a society where as long as you don't make a mistake, you win annual promotion. Taking a risk, however, can prove suicidal. (Japan's suicide rate for adult males is among the world's highest.)

In the simpler Cold War world, when strength in mass production inevitably led to national wealth, the West came to admire the perseverance, discipline and group ethic that informed Japan's stirring rise into the first rank of industrial powers. A homogeneous society governed by seniority, reciprocal loyalty between salary man and boss, and consensus-based management, as well as congenial, sometimes collusive links between businessman and bureaucrat, Japan seemed to have found the magic formula for economic growth—one that eluded Western nations staggered by crime, turmoil in the workplace, class difference and civil disorder. Japanese didn't sue each other or go on strike; they worked hard, produced fault-free cars and electronics and served as a bulwark against communist instability in Asia.

But 15 years after the collapse of Japan's "bubble economy," the demise of the Soviet empire and the dawn of a "postindustrial" society distinguished by creativity and customization, the Japanese have not yet been able to rekindle their economic engine, and there is growing fear, in Japan and elsewhere, that China and South Korea are stealing its thunder.

Today, Japanese citizens increasingly realize that the same system that forges group consensus and represses dissent actively resists the sort of "creative destruction" a new century demands. Perhaps that's why so many of the best and brightest are leaving.

Americans must wonder whether their last, best ally in Asia will inevitably turn inward rather than engage the outside world, or face up to its need for fundamental change. Someday that irrepressible human desire inside all of us for autonomy and self-expression—and making trouble—must be unleashed.

Zielenziger, former Tokyo bureau chief for Knight Ridder Newspapers, is a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley.

By MOHAMMAD ASHRAF, PH.D.

Ashraf is an International Resource Economist. He is solely responsible for the views expressed in this column and doesn't represent the views of Saipan Tribune. His email address is ashmdr@hotmail.com



Guest workers and their role in development

Q What are the contributions and strains of guest workers to our economic well-being?

A It's the sweat and hard work of guest workers that made the mushrooming growth of the CNMI's economy possible. It all happened in a span of a decade, which is a relatively short time in the context of development history of an emerging small community like ours. These guest workers brought along endless dedication, commitment to work, and ready-to-use skills both for the public and private sector employers. Without these workers CNMI would be waiting for decades to accomplish the development marvels that its people are enjoying today.

Why do guest workers have such a dedication and commitment to work? The answer lies in the sacrifice that they made by leaving their homes and loved ones to come to our land of opportunity. They have a clear mission—to better the life for themselves and their families. The CNMI has afforded them the opportunity and I'm sure they are thankful from the bottom of their hearts for this. Performance on the job is their main focus and the employers should be pleased with it.

Now, what may be some of the strains of these workers on our small resident community? As I mentioned previously, all "goods" when used up have a residue, what is called "bad" or waste that need to be managed appropriately. For that matter negative residual of these workers may be no exception. Stress on the public infrastructure such as public safety, health, and other government services are the key elements of concern. But remember not to undermine the contributions of these workers to help bring these services to the level that we find them today. In particular, the departments of Public Safety and Public Health have continued to face the challenges of providing adequate services because of the added burden of the highly diverse needs of this group.

Letters to the Editor

Treating investors like criminals

It is foolhardy to treat investors like thieves via the imposition of frivolous demands that will reverberate in the ears of other prospective investors. It compromises the over \$1 million spent on a single year on travel by this administration on trade missions.

I've done my homework on Pacific Telecom Inc. It's a company of international stature in terms global telecommunications quite difficult for nimble minds to comprehend given our "everything is government" mentality. Instead of frustrating PTI, the NMI ought to roll out the carpet, especially at a time when it's dragging its tongue on the filthy dirt of a very sluggish economy, hoping to find bread crumbs to fill its empty coffers.

PTI understands its role and responsibility as a corporate citizen in terms of helping the NMI attain its goal as a financial hub and the upgrade of other services that will benefit the education and health sectors. To impose a \$10M bond is, agreeably, at best, punitive; a condescending imposition against investors from the Pearl of the Orient. Is there a need to treat them as criminals under probation? Is a multi-million dollar investment a crime?

In the palm of PTI is the future of the NMI's economic viability. It's time to talk WITH and not TO Pacific Telecom Inc.

John S. DelRosario, Jr.
Koblerville, Saipan

Saipan Tribune

CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

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New kid on the block

An alert reader brought my attention to a news story that highlights a new airplane charter company that will be servicing the islands. On Monday, Guam's Pacific Daily News reported that Sky Blue Air has secured federal aviation approval to operate. The Guam based company is starting out with a lone Beech King Air 90, says the story, and aspires to reach not only the Mariana islands, but all the way into the Federated States of Micronesia as well.

Hmm. That's an interesting project. The question from the reader who brought it to my attention is, "Do these guys have a chance of staying in business?"

A chance, yes, but chances in charter are slim. I've been involved with a lot of aviation in the Mariana islands, in both the airplane and helicopter realms. And, I've logged a bit of time as a King Air 90 driver, so I suppose that my guess is as good as any....and my guess is that government money will swing the balance one way or the other. I doubt that there's enough private sector demand to keep a \$950-an-hour airplane like that booked enough to pay the bills. But if some government action comes along, maybe they can make a solid go of it. Such is my guess, anyway.

Charter is a notoriously difficult business, usually because of the cut-throat nature of the industry's pricing structure. As one wonk observed, "You're only as smart as the dumbest competitor." Indeed, the low-ball pricing philosophy means that the biggest loser who is going out of business drives the prices. But the Marianas aren't exactly crawling with charter operators, so Sky Blue Air has got itself a niche, which should keep the pricing pressures at bay. The reported \$950 an hour they charge is a good bit higher than you'll find in the states, at least if my memory is serving me well.

Still, it takes an aggressive and determined marketing effort to land charter sales, here or anywhere else. I should know, I've sold such services. When I called Sky Blue Air during business hours to ask them a few questions, I got an answering machine. Bad sign. Charter customers don't want answering machines, they want live bodies to give them instant answers.

As for the King Air 90, well, it is a good aircraft design, and a

Letters to the Editor

Saipan Tribune welcomes contributions. All letters intended for publication must include the writer's name, address and, if possible, fax or telephone number. Letters are edited for space, clarity and fairness.

Do it because it's right, forget that it's unpopular

Mr. Andrew Salas, I appeal to your attention to go forth with your initiatives regardless of the criticisms currently being levied and will be levied on you concerning your actions. You are doing the right things for all the right reasons and don't falter in your efforts and determination because you are a special breed of man, unlike the lame-duck opponents who do nothing but criticize the positive actions of others, because they themselves can't demonstrate nor display positive initiatives on their behalf.

So take the heat levied against you Mr. Salas, because the fruit of your determined efforts for positive change will ultimately propel you to a level of being respected by the general public for pursuing what is right.

You know as well as I do Mr. Salas that opponents against positive change will always oppose another's action when change is pursued, especially when such change tend to affect whatever self-benefit one might be receiving from abuse or misuse to any given opportunity. And contrary to what anyone may or may not believe, you are in fact pursuing a positive objective that for years should have been addressed. Nevertheless, my friend, what matters is that someone such as yourself has proven beyond a shadow of doubt that you mean business with respect to your planned objectives, for the sake of curtailing blatant and intentional improprieties where abuse and misuse is rampant.

Allow me to provide a very prime example of abuse and misuse of existing labor mandates. More importantly the below example constitutes blatant discrimination against our potentially qualified local residents, and I've harped on this subject two previous letters back. They are as follow:

Take a look and review for example most of the advertised "Job Vacancy Announcement" which are being published in the news wherein a vast majority of businesses managed by foreign employers require or prefer applicants that speak, read, write, and understand fluent, Japanese, Chinese, or the Korean language. This requirement is justifiable and in compliance with U.S. Dictionary of Occupational Skills when the vacant position is for tour-agents, tour-guides, certain hotel front-desk clerks, or hotel-reservations or any position that has direct contact, communication, or dealings with foreign tour-agents, tourist, or foreign guest. But more often than not we read ads that require an applicant to possess the abovementioned criteria for vacancies that have no relevance or connection with the above positions and are more or less defined as back-of-the-house operations that require no direct contact with foreign tourist or foreign guest such as Operations Manager, Quality-Control Manager, and most any other managerial or supervisory positions that provide higher salary compensation and/or benefits. And let's not forget bus drivers for tourist transportation companies wherein many applicants are being required to also possess the above linguistic skill.

3CMC4, Provision 4412 clearly mandates the use of the U.S. Dic-

By ED STEPHENS

Ed Stephens, Jr. is an economist and columnist for the Saipan Tribune. "Ed4Saipan@yahoo.com"



well-established player on the short haul, executive transportation circuit. A King Air 90 will typically have about seven to 10 seats, depending. And these aren't just civvy sissies either. Various versions of the King Air have seen service in the U.S. Navy, Army, and Marines. I can't say one way or the other about the Air Force, I simply don't know.

The planes are powered by two turboprop engines. They are not fast; I don't recall ever going more than 265 knots (305 mph) in any King Air 90, but if my memory is faulty it's probably not far off that mark. But they are reliable, very safe, very easy to fly, and popular with pilots. As for passenger popularity, some folks like them, but some strongly prefer jets. Propeller driven aircraft are more efficient for short distances, since jets are fuel-sucking pigs down at low altitudes. Overall, I'd say the King Air is a great plane for island hopping for distances on the order of a few hundred miles. Beyond that...well, then we're getting into small jet territory because of passenger comfort issues, but this is a subjective call. I'm also a jet pilot so maybe I'm just biased toward jets.

As for aspiring to service the Federated States of Micronesia, yikes, that's no picnic. I've known of a couple of projects out that way that became sheer and utter failures, and these were conducted by some knowledgeable aviation pros.

Such is my conjecture and speculation. Most people who have made a small fortune in the charter business started out with a large fortune. Hopefully, Sky Blue Air will be able to beat those odds, but it is a very, very difficult business to succeed in.

tionary of Occupational Skills when matching local applicant referrals to job vacancy announcements. Nowhere does such provision state that employers, especially foreign employers, can just pick and choose their own selective criteria so as to employ their own people while attempting to frustrate the efforts and opportunities of our potentially qualified local resident applicants. Such criteria that these foreign employers establish in their job vacancy announcements are a bunch of hogwash and unlawful. These employers should be seriously penalized for noncompliance of the U.S. Occupational Standard when placing criteria for their job vacancy announcements in news ads. Such a fine should be in the amount of \$5,000 for first offence, \$10,000 for the second, and deportation with a 5-year ban from entering the Commonwealth on their third offence. And if anyone believes that such amount is unconstitutional then they should review many of the lawsuit amounts that have been levied on companies that were found to be in serious violation of federal and local labor statutes, especially where discrimination is quite evident.

Furthermore, if any Japanese-owned hospitality corporations in the Commonwealth believe that they are grandfathered and protected by the U.S. and Japan Treaty Agreement in hiring their own people for executive and other managerial positions without having to comply with local or federal labor statutes, then allow me to clarify such agreement. The U.S. and Japan Treaty states that Japan will not be barred from establishing investments in the U.S. or any of its territories. Furthermore that Japanese corporations in Japan can maintain a sub-entity business within the U.S. or its territories and allow their executive managers to manage such sub-entities where GMs, Financial Directors, Reservation Managers, and Front-Office Managers are concerned, without having to hire locally. Such an agreement, however, does not apply nor does it grandfather Japanese businesses that are locally incorporated nor does it apply to a third sub-entity business belonging to a Japanese corporation.

Unfortunately, my past efforts of vying for public office so as to vigorously pursue the introduction of bills that would greatly reduce, curtail, or eliminate altogether such discrimination and abuse against our local residents have been to no avail. But let there be no mistake in my attempts to stand for our local residents even though I may not be in public office. I do not give up easily in any attempts I pursue, especially when my pursuit encompasses subject matters dealing with our local residents and what pertains to their livelihood that would benefit them individually, their family, and the betterment of the Commonwealth in general. So pursue your initiatives, Andrew, because it's the right thing to do, and don't be discouraged by others for pursuing an unpopular objective. You are an Arabian stallion in a field of mustangs.

Jack T. Quitugua
Garapan, Saipan



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

MAN'AMKO CONFERENCE

The CNMI's elderly population and their concerns will take center stage during the 2004 Conference on Aging that is scheduled for Tuesday, May 11. The public conference will be held at the Hibicus Hall of the Dai Ichi Hotel Saipan Beach, with the theme, "Aging Well...Living Well: Living with Age Related Disabilities and Preventing Elder Abuse & Neglect."

EX-CUSTOMS

From Page 1

were mailed and shipped from off-island. The video materials depicted undamaged persons engaging in sexually explicit conduct.

Taitano allegedly received the video materials last April 22 on Rota. Bowers also charged Taitano with six counts of possession of child pornography.

Receipt of child pornography carries a mandatory minimum sentence of five years imprisonment, and a maximum term of 20 years without the possibility of parole plus

\$250,000-fine. Each of the possession of child pornography charge carries a prison term of up to 10 years and a fine of up to \$250,000, the prosecutors said.

The FBI and the U.S. Postal Inspections Service investigated the case against Taitano.

Rapadas urged those who might have information about anyone engaged in activities similar to the allegations against Taitano to report the matter to the U.S. Postal Inspectors office at (671) 735-2124 or the Federal Bureau of Investigation at (670) 322-6934/5.

SOME

From Page 1

ees and I don't think this is different. We could not approve one and disapprove another [if they are of similar cases]," said Deleon Guerrero.

For his part, board chair Joseph C. Reyes said the issue is a little sticky since it may be bordering on the issue of "double dipping."

"We must be careful... We might end up later finding that the same people we are running after are the same people we've granted exemptions," said the chairman.

For her part, Deleon Guerrero said

the request would not be a case of double dipping because the retirement pension of those granted the exemption would be suspended.

Still, Reyes said the rules are subject to different interpretations.

He said the exemption involves two issues: re-employment and compensation/benefits, which would be based on the interpretation of the rules.

Double dipping drains the funds of the local retirement system since it essentially allows the same employer—the government—to pay the Fund member twice in terms of pension benefits and salaries.

Due to shortage in the local labor pool, the law allows double dipping only for certain professionals—doctors, nurses, teachers, etc.—to a maximum of two years.

Meantime, member Rosita Santos inquired during yesterday's meeting whether the board has actually the authority to restrict re-employment of retirees.

Her question was also reserved by the legal counsel for the executive session.

CDA

From Page 1

bottom. I foresaw this situation. I advised the administration to advise Ken Wright that I will put on hold whatever I'm doing," said Igisomar.

He said the CDA, as requested initially by Gov. Juan N. Babauta, had explored the possibility of interim financing for the college but it found that "the limiting factor was NMC."

He did not elaborate but noted that although the project is "beautiful," CDA needs to follow rules and regulations "to make sure that we're not compromised in our decision making, especially when we're handling public funds."

He said CDA has to make sure there is a return on the investment.

"The bottom line is what is the return of investment? We don't just invest and kiss the money goodbye. We make sure we protect taxpayers' money," he said.

CDA board economic development committee chair Tom Quitugua said that CDA had met with a commercial bank and approached another agency for federal assistance for the project.

"But there are legal issues to iron out such as the ability of NMC incurring debts on its own," he said.

The college was hoping to get interim financing through CDA while it was waiting for either a direct loan or a loan guarantee from the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development. It turned out that NMC has never submitted any formal application with USDA.

NMC earlier projected that it would need some \$10 million for the renovation of the La Fiesta property and purchase of classroom equipment for Pacific Gateway.

NMC entered into a \$7.5 million purchase of the La Fiesta mall last August 2003 for the program, which was supposed to begin in August this year.

BABAUTA

From Page 1

In a statement released by Babauta's lawyer, Assistant Attorney General James Livingstone, the governor said the proposed sale of Verizon provides an opportunity to change the monopoly that has existed in the CNMI for several years.

"There is only one inter-island cable and it is controlled by Verizon. Almost all communications within the Commonwealth are also controlled by Verizon. If PTI has its way, it will just fill Verizon's position. That is not in the public interest," Babauta said.

MTC spokesperson Tonie Apatang declined to comment when reached last night but promised to come out with the company's statement on the matter today.

Babauta and CNMI consumer counsel Brian Caldwell jointly filed with the Commonwealth Telecommunications Commission this week a proposal for the establishment of enforcement provisions to ensure that the company would not violate an agreement should the sale be approved by the CTC. They also proposed to require PTI to post at least \$10 million in performance bond to ensure that it has the financial capability to pay a fine, if any is imposed.

MTC and PTI opposed the governor's proposal, saying that the bond requirement is unnecessary. PTI's Jose Ricardo Delgado accused the governor of bias against his company, adding that Babauta's prejudicial stance is scaring away potential foreign investors.

Before Babauta and Caldwell jointly submitted the proposal, CTC settle-

Senate lauds Verizon, PTI for deal

By EDITH G. ALEJANDRO
REPORTER

Sen. Paul Manglona lauded participants in the negotiation between Micronesia Telecommunication Co., Pacific Telecom Inc., and the CNMI panel on their efforts to eliminate inter-island toll charges that would benefit the entire Commonwealth.

Manglona told members of the Senate during Wednesday's session that the decision is a historical moment for Rota and Tinian residents, adding that the decision is only the beginning of a profitable future for the CNMI.

"The PTI is a good partner of the

CNMI and I believe that they would do their best to comply will all the restrictions that come along with the purchase of the Verizon," Manglona said.

Also, the senator believes that there would be future investments that would shore up the revenue of the Commonwealth and would initiate vital developments to the telecommunication industry of the Northern Marianas.

"I would like to thank the governor and PTI for these achievements," said the Rota senator.

Senator Pete Reyes echoed Manglona, adding that PTI owners are notable people doing business in the

ment officer Sean Frink released the Final Agreed Negotiation Report that stated that the government and PTI have reached an agreement on 27 issues concerning the Verizon deal, including an end to inter-island long distance charges within the CNMI and the retention of all current employees.

PTI has also reportedly committed to increase local competition and to guarantee certain technological offerings and no rate increases for years.

Babauta also noted PTI's commitment to open up its network to allow competitors to lease access to parts of the network at wholesale prices. He said this type of activity has happened all over the U.S. and has resulted in higher quality service and lower prices for customers.

"While the governor believes these

stipulations will go a long way toward the process of breaking the monopoly and bringing competition to the Commonwealth with the resulting benefits of lower prices, higher quality and more choices for consumers, these stipulations are not enough," the governor's media release stated.

"The governor does not believe that any one company or individual—not Verizon, not PTI, not anyone—should be able to control our economic destiny to the extent that the owner of the cable currently does," it added.

Babauta said Verizon's ownership of the CNMI's only fiber optic cable has already scared away at least one potential investor that wanted to put up a call center in the Commonwealth. He insisted that the Verizon's sole cable ownership is "anti-business and is hurt-

Philippines.

Gov. Juan N. Babauta had said Monday that part of the deal between the CNMI government and PTI for the purchase of Verizon is that inter-island toll charges should be eliminated and a flat rate should be set up for all calls within the three islands.

The governor added, however, that before the proposed purchase becomes a done deal, enforcement procedures should be set up and that PTI be required to post a \$10-million bond to ensure that the company will not violate the conditions of an approved settlement.

ing our economy."

Delgado views the bond proposal as a manifestation of Babauta's bias against him, adding that the governor has not given his company any incentive, as what is usually given to any potential investor.

Apatang, MTC's spokesperson, had also expressed the company's disagreement over the proposed enforcement provisions and bond requirement, saying the bond would just add to the cost of business operations instead of allowing the money's use for other purposes that could benefit employees.

She stressed that the CTC has regulatory and enforcement powers—which are already in place—over telecom companies, and mentioned that MTC has operated well since 1981 and has one of the largest workforce locally.

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Disabilities council to honor 10 advocates

In celebration of March as National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, the CNMI Council on Developmental Disabilities will honor 10 advocates of the year today at the Aqua Resort Club beginning at 11am.

According to council executive director Thomas J. Camacho, the Annual Advocate of the Year ceremony is an annual event that the council started several years ago to coincide with the annual developmental

disabilities awareness month.

“It is a time set aside to recognize those individuals, private and public entities and other members in the community for their advocacy work this past year,” he explained.

The awardees will be awarded in the following categories:

- **Advocate of the Year.** To meet the criteria for this nomination, the nominee must be a person without a disability who facilitated and resulted to policy changes, removal of

physical barriers, assisted a person(s) with developmental disability(ies) receive supports and services or advocacy assistance through attorney, file complaints or NMPASI;

- **Transportation Advocate of the Year.** To meet the criteria for this nomination, the nominee must be an entity that provided or expanded its transportation services not otherwise available in the community);
- **Employer Advocate of the Year.** To meet the criteria for

this nomination, the nominee must be an employer that directly hired (not training agreement with OVR but as a result of OVR or WIA efforts) and provided reasonable accommodations including training to an employee with developmental disabilities, that lasted at least one year);

- **Family Advocate of the Year.** To meet the criteria for this nomination, the nominee must have a child(ren) with a developmental disability, most

Fitia vows to assist NMI disability council

After attending a CNMI Developmental Disabilities Council educational presentation last Tuesday, House Speaker Benigno R. Fitia expressed his strong willingness to support the council’s efforts through local legislation.

In a letter to DDC executive director Thomas J. Camacho, Fitia said: “I will be conferring with the House legal counsels who attended the seminar to decide on the course of action the House will take concerning those important issues you and the other guest speakers pointed out, which require legislative consideration.”

In an annual educational presentation at the Aqua Resort last Tuesday, Camacho discussed the mission and mandate of the Disabilities Council, as well as the issues confronting the council from a local and national standpoint.

One issue that Camacho raised is the need for the establishment of a local govern-



Fitia

ment respite program to care for disabled clients. Such a proposal is currently supported by House Bill 14-9, which is sponsored by Rep. Benjamin Seman.

Another proposal put forth by Camacho is legislation that would grant tax breaks to businesses or individuals rendering services to disabled individuals, along with the updating of the CNMI Building Code to conform with the U.S. Department of Justice Americans with Disabilities Act certification.

“I want to congratulate you and thank you for the excellent seminar you and your group conducted yesterday,” said the speaker to Camacho, adding that he was thoroughly impressed with the quality of presentation and exhibit of materials at the seminar.

Also present at the DDC seminar were representatives Clyde Norita, Ray Yumul, and Janet Maratita.

especially very young child(ren) with developmental disabilities who advocated on behalf of their child to get supports or services or exercise their civil rights in education, early childhood, independent living, health care, recreation, transportation, etc.;

- **Public Entity Advocate of the Year.** To meet the criteria for this nomination, the nominee must be a government entity that made their program(s) and services accessible, advocated for equal access, provided special accommodations, changed their policies and practices, included provisions on ADA requirements for public benefits, that impacts citizens with developmental disabilities and their families.);
- **Legislative Advocate of the Year.** To meet the criteria for this nomination, the nominee must have introduced bills or resolutions, and assisted with the passage of law that benefits and impacts a person’s life and their families’;
- **Private Business Advocate of the Year.** To meet the criteria for this nomination, the nominee must be a private entity that made their programs, services accessible, advocated for equal access, provided special accommodations, changed their policies and practices, included provisions on ADA requirements for public benefits, impacts citizens with developmental disabilities and their families, etc.;
- **Self Advocate of the Year.** To meet the criteria for this nomination, the nominee must be person with developmental disabilities who advocated for him/herself to become productive, independent, included, and as a result of their

advocacy efforts, became employed, effected policy changes, buildings accessibility, exercised his/her civil rights, supports or programs or services redesigned or more accessible, or made available;

- **Community Advocate of the Year.** To meet the criteria for this nomination, the nominee may be any community member at-large, who advocates for people (or a person) with developmental disabilities to get supports or services or exercise their civil rights in education, employment, independent living, health care, recreation, transportation, or who’s actions benefit the lives of people with developmental disabilities;
- **Educator Advocate of the Year.** To meet the criteria for this nomination, the nominee must be an education entity or personnel who advocated on behalf of a group of students to get appropriate and quality education, school became accessible, education policy creation or change, secure funding to support education, etc.

The event today will be keynoted by council chairman Mariano K. Camacho, while the opening remarks will be given by the Council executive director.

Gov. Juan N. Babauta, Lt. Gov. Diego T. Benavente, Senate President Joaquin G. Adriano, House Speaker Benigno R. Fitia, Presiding Judges of the Superior and Supreme Courts, including District Court Judge Alex Munson, Saipan Mayor Juan B. Tudela and Northern Islands Mayor Valentin Taisakan have been invited.

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Island Snapshots



SOUVENIR SHOT

Associate Justice John Manglona, far left and former Rep. Ana Teregeyo join members of the Judicial Celebration hospitality committee during the Covenant Day Forum Wednesday at the Dai ichi Hotel. From left Tan Holdings Corp. corporate staff Teri Flores, Claire Sablan, Angel Demapan Jonathan Attao and Wally Chong.

LIBERTY DONES



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

COWPENS

Gov. Juan N. Babauta presents a plaque of appreciation to the commander of the USS Cowpens, Captain Charles Dixon, during the ship's recent visit to Saipan. The ship's Executive Officer, Lt. Commander David Johnson, looks on.

JUDICIARY FORUM

Supreme Court Chief Justice Miguel Demapan and Washington Rep. Pete A. Tenorio pose with former Superior Court Judge Virginia S. Onerheim and judge Ramona Manglona during Wednesday's judiciary-sponsored forum at Dai ichi Hotel.

LIBERTY DONES



TOUGH

Douglas B. Moylan, Guam's first elected attorney general, delivers his second State of Protecting the Public Interest address to the people of Guam last week before a capacity audience at the Chamorro Ballroom of the Marriott Hotel-Guam.

EDUARDO C. SIGUENZA

From left, front row, are Jeff Boyer of Shell Marianas, who donated prizes for two lucky winners from other schools on Saipan, DYS representative Laura Ogu-moro, and Oleai acting principal Celina Romolor. At the back, from left, are UFO officers and advisers Rolando Pamintuan, Leo Canedo, Flor Miranda, Flossie Baylon, and Ed Reyes.

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

OLEAI WINS

Oleai Elementary School won 1st place with the most number of participants in the "Walk for the Children" program in April. The event was sponsored by the Department of Youth and Services and organized by the United Filipino Organization. Shown in this photo are Ed Reyes, Flossie Baylon, DYS representative Laura Ogumoro, Rolando Pamintuan, Ruby Pamintuan, Leo Canedo, Jeff Boyer of Shell Marianas, who donated a computer to the school, Oleai acting principal Celina Romolor, Flor Miranda, and some Oleai students.

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PAWS LINE
Verizon marketing manager Russ Quinn, second from left, presents PAWS board members with the PAWS Information Line. From left, PAWS president Mike Pai, Quinn, Bobbi Grizzard, Cristy Gregg and Cynthia. PAWS is announcing its new information line, 233-PAWS, sponsored by Verizon. You can call the line to get information on PAWS news, current fundraisers and special events. The PAWS information line can also be used to seek membership information, volunteer opportunities, and participation in PAWS programs.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



HANGING OUT WITH THE GOVERNOR
Gov. Juan N. Babauta displays his immunization awareness T-shirt as he poses with Capriciosa-Garapan staff Tuesday. The governor signed last week a proclamation declaring an immunization week in efforts to promote immunization among children in the CNMI.

LIBERTY DONES

HOMESTEAD LOTTERY

The Marianas Public Lands Authority distributes a total of 146 homestead lots on Rota in a lottery held last April 30. The lottery was participated in by 148 eligible homestead applicants. The lot drawing, held at Rota Public Library, was reportedly attended by Gov. Juan N. Babauta.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



SHOOTING TILT

CNMI JROTC marksmanship teams outdo each other in a recent competition. Congratulations and thanks to Capt. Joseph Santos, the Tinian JROTC Senior Army Instructor, and SFC Richard Haugh of the Saipan Southern JROTC for their work in preparing the marksmanship site. Sgt. Maj. Jesus Leon Guerrero, former MHS Army Instructor and Army Instructor for Simon Sanchez High School on Guam, graded the target scores for the competition.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



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Business

ONE-HALF DISCOUNT STORE

Giving you more bang for your buck

By JOHN RAVELO
REPORTER

Want a return from your purchase?
One-Half Discount Store, a supermarket on Middle Road, Gualo Rai, claims to be the only supermarket on-island to literally give back 15 percent of a customer's purchases.
Store manager Chae Sungun said, however, that the privi-

lege could only be enjoyed by holders of 1/2 Discount's cash-back card, which could be availed of for free.
For every dollar worth of purchase, Chae said a cardholder earns \$0.15 cents on his card. The value earned may be used to purchase items at the store.
"We have the cheapest items on the island," Chae said. "We want to give back benefit to the customers."

Chae said the store has over 3,500 kinds of merchandise. In celebration of Mother's Day this coming Sunday, Chae said the store has offered 1,000 items at 50 percent off the regular price at a tent sale that has been ongoing since Wednesday. The tent sale will run through Sunday.
At the tent sale, one can have an electronic grill plate for only \$18.50, a family kitchen set for only \$8.50, or a micro-

scale radio-control racing car for only \$7.50.
The store carries assorted merchandise—household items, food and dairy products, and appliances, among many others.
Soopoong Saipan Corp. owns and operates 1/2 Discount. Korean businessman Lee Sang Kyu heads the company as president.
The company established the store at its previous location on Beach Road, Susupe in Aug.



JOHN RAVELO

Store manager Chae Sungun pose inside the new location of One-Half Discount Store on Middle Road, just near the offices of Verizon.

2002. In May 2003, it moved to a bigger location on Middle Road, just near the offices of Verizon.
Chae said business operations have been doing well. Although there has been no expansion plan yet for another branch, he said this might happen eventually. "Everyday, the business is getting better."
One-Half Discount opens daily from 8:30am to 11pm.

Revised SBA rules create opportunities for veterans

The U.S. Small Business Administration announced yesterday a new procurement program that will boost federal contract opportunities for service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses. The interim rule will be published today and is effective immediately. The Federal Acquisition Regulatory Council concurrently released regulations implementing the program.
"President Bush has made it a priority to reach out to all of America's entrepreneurs, and we have a special responsibility to make an effort for those who sacrificed for our safety and freedom," SBA administrator Hector V. Barreto said. "We have made a strong effort to do precisely that. Federal contract dollars to service-disabled veterans increased from \$298 million in fiscal year 2002 to \$510 million in FY2003. But we want to do more. The regulations being issued today [yesterday] will ensure that those great Americans who served our country proudly continue to have fair and open access to contracting opportunities."
The new rule will amend the relevant sections of the Code of Federal Regulations, adding provisions that will allow contracting officers to restrict contract awards to service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses when there is a reasonable expectation that two or more service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses will submit bids at a fair market price. It also allows awards of sole-source contracts to service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses when there is not a reasonable expectation that two or more service-disabled veteran-owned firms will submit bids and the anticipated contract price does not exceed \$3 million, with the exception of manufacturing contracts where the contracting threshold is \$5 million.
The interim rule allows small businesses to self-certify as service-disabled veteran-owned businesses. Any challenge to a firm's status as a small business or standing as a service-disabled veteran-owned small business must be referred to the SBA for resolution. The SBA will rely upon existing Department of Veteran's Affairs or Department of Defense determinations regarding status and will help enforce penalties for false representation.

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LIBERTY DONES
Private consultant John Scott, AMPRO president, gives pointers during an OSHA workshop at Pacific Islands Club.

NMI biz ‘progressing’ in OSHA compliance

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

Industries in the CNMI are “progressing in the right direction” when it comes to awareness and compliance with the occupational safety and health standards, experts said.

Private consultant John Scott, AMPRO president, said in an interview during a workshop yesterday at Pacific Islands Club, that businesses in the CNMI, particularly the garment manufacturers, have shown a remarkable change in that area over the years.

As a result, he said, the focus has now shifted from garment to construction as well as general industries.

“Construction by nature is hazardous business so we want to make sure that people are protected and know the safety

standards,” Scott said.

The biggest challenge in the CNMI, he said, is the fact that most employees come from different places and are therefore not familiar with the U.S. OSHA standards.

“I’d say that’s one of the biggest challenges. They [nonresident workers] are not aware of U.S. standards,” he said.

Scott and AMPRO safety manager Terry P. Badley served as guest speakers in a three-day OSHA workshop/training at PIC, which ended yesterday.

The workshop, which focused on construction and general industries, was attended by about 70 participants from various companies and government offices on Saipan.

In an interview, Badley cited the following areas as the most common cause of accidents in construction: electrical,

fall protection, struck-by, caught in between, and trenching and excavation.

For general industries, he said common areas of concerns are personnel protective equipment, electrical, fall protection, walking and working surfaces.

“People get killed for lack of protection and the lack of safety measures. These can be avoided if people have the knowledge and awareness,” he said.

In previous years, OSHA experts have helped garment companies in the CNMI develop their own safety and health programs, which include employee involvement, periodic safety audits, training and education, employment of a safety/health professional within the factory, record keeping, worker housing accommodations, sanitation, fire safety, safety/health program analysis and cooperation.

Most of Continental’s flights in March arrived on time

Continental Micronesia’s on-time performance in March 2004 was better than all U.S. airlines that submit figures to the Department of Transportation’s Air Travel Consumer Report, the airline said in a statement.

It said that 94.7 percent of the regional carrier’s flights arrived within 14 minutes of scheduled arrival time.

Further, Continental Micronesia completed 99.8 percent of its scheduled available seat miles in March, with baggage handling at 99.9 percent. The airline also reported a 74.8 percent system-wide load factor in March.

Continental Micronesia’s operational performance statistics for March 2004 was compared against a recent Department of Transportation consumer report.

Continental Airlines is the world’s sixth-largest airline with more than 2,800 daily de-

partures throughout the Americas, Europe and Asia. Continental serves 149 domestic and 117 international destinations—more than any other airline in the world—and nearly 200 additional points are served

ries approximately 51 million passengers per year. FORTUNE ranks Continental one of the 100 Best Companies to Work For in America, an honor it has earned for six consecutive years. FORTUNE also ranks Continental as the top airline in its Most Admired Global Companies in 2004. For more company information, visit continental.com.

Continental Micronesia is headquartered in Guam and operates a Pacific hub from the A.B. Won Pat Guam International Airport. A wholly owned subsidiary of Continental Airlines, Continental Micronesia offers more than 290 departures each week between 22 cities throughout the Pacific Rim, the Micronesian Islands and Hawaii with a fleet of 13 next-generation Boeing 737 narrowbody and 767 widebody aircraft.

March 04 On-Time Arrivals	
Airline	
Continental Micronesia	94.7%
Hawaiian	91.7%
Atlantic Southeast	87.8%
Skywest	87.1%
Airtran	85.3%
Jetblue	85.0%
Comair	84.4%
US Airways	84.1%
Southwest	83.9%
Delta	83.7%
United	80.8%
ATA	80.4%

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation Air Travel Consumer Report, May 2004

via codeshare partner airlines. With 41,000 mainline employees, the airline has hubs serving New York, Houston, Cleveland and Guam, and car-

sand castle

movie station

Interest rates move higher ahead of change

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER
AP ECONOMICS WRITER

WASHINGTON (AP)—Consumers will not have to wait until this summer to see what kind of impact a Federal Reserve decision to move to higher interest rates would have on their pocketbooks. The Fed’s policy of telegraphing its intentions has already sent consumer rates higher.

And analysts believe those rate increases in home mortgages and bank certificates of deposits will continue to occur in coming months, even though they don’t think the Fed will actually start raising the key interest rate it controls until, probably, August.

Through a series of carefully timed comments by Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan and other officials, and subtle changes in the announcements issued by the Fed’s interest-rate setting Federal Open Market Committee, the central bank is sending a clear message that rates will be headed higher.

“The Fed so far has done a very good job with its open-mouth policy of preparing the markets for an eventual rise in interest rates,” said Sung Won Sohn, chief economist at Wells Fargo & Co. in Minneapolis.

The Fed’s main policy lever is its target for the federal funds rate, the overnight rate that banks charge each other. The

funds rate, an important determinant of short-term rates, has been at a 46-year low of 1 percent since last June.

Financial markets certainly are not waiting for that rate to climb. Over the past seven weeks, the longer-term rates controlled by markets have been on a significant rise.

Rates for 30-year fixed-rate mortgages, which hit a low for this year of 5.38 percent the week of March 18, rose above 6 percent last week to 6.01 percent, according to Freddie Mac’s nationwide survey.

That increase tracks the rise in Treasury’s benchmark 10-year note, which has gone from 3.76 percent seven weeks ago to

above 4.5 percent this week.

So what should consumers do in this environment of rising rates?

Analysts suggest that those chronic procrastinators who have not yet refinanced their home mortgages should waste no time in doing so.

They have missed the four-decade low for 30-year mortgages of 5.21 percent set in June 2003, but refinancing at rates just north of 6 percent would still save money.

Savers who have suffered through extremely low rates on their bank certificates of deposits will benefit in a rising rate world.

Greg McBride, financial

analysts at Bankrate.com, a personal finances Web site, said rates on five-year certificates of deposit, now at a national average of 3.13 percent, are up significantly from their low of 2.45 percent hit last July.

Analysts advise that savers ought to continue to favor shorter-term maturities of a year or less over the next six to 12 months so that they can invest in longer-term CDs as rates rise.

Consumers with credit card debt, auto loans and most home equity loans still have a bit of a reprieve on higher interest rates because this debt is generally tied to the Fed’s federal funds rate.

Analysts advise paying off as much of this debt as possible in the next few months, before the Fed ratchets rates. Commercial banks’ prime lending rate, the benchmark for millions of short-term consumer and business loans, is still at 4 percent, but it will be heading higher in lockstep with changes in the federal funds rate.

To predict how high rates will go, analysts pointed to the Fed’s own statement Tuesday, which said that the central bank

believes with inflation low and plenty of slack in the economy, any rate increases are likely “to be measured.”

Many private economists interpreted that as meaning gradual quarter-point rate hikes which will start in August and then occur roughly at every other meeting over the next two or three years.

That could take the 1-percent funds rate up to 2 percent by the summer of 2005 and 3 percent by the summer of 2006. That’s a far more gradual move than the 3-percentage point hike in the funds rate that the Fed engineered over a 12-month period in 1994, which sent shock waves through financial markets at home and abroad, pushing the Mexican peso into crisis and driving debt problems of Orange County, Calif.

No one is predicting that type of calamity this time. But analysts warn there could be fallout from rising rates in such areas as housing sales, which have been driven to record levels by super low mortgage rates, and in auto sales, where popular zero-rate financing incentives have been driving sales.

Stewart’s motion for second trial denied

NEW YORK (AP)—A federal judge refused to grant Martha Stewart a new trial Wednesday, dismissing claims that a juror lied to conceal a bias against the celebrity homemaker.

The decision by U.S. District Judge Miriam Goldman Cedarbaum clears the way for a hearing next month at which Stewart could be sentenced to more than a year in prison for lying about a stock sale.

Stewart claimed juror Chappell Hartridge lied repeatedly on his jury questionnaire, including failing to disclose he had been arrested in a domestic dispute and accused of stealing money from a Little League group.

Whether or not the charges are true, Cedarbaum wrote, they do not meet the legal standard of showing the juror would have been excused for bias during jury selection.

“Many of the allegations offered to support these claims amount to little more than hearsay, speculation and, in one instance, vague allegations made by a person who refused to identify himself,” the judge wrote.

Cedarbaum also denied a new trial for Peter Bacanovic, who was convicted along with Stewart on March 5 for lying about why Stewart sold 3,928 shares of ImClone Systems stock in 2001, just before the stock price plunged.

Bacanovic made similar al-

legations against Hartridge, and lawyers added that one juror had told them the jury discussed an expensive handbag that Stewart toted to court during the trial.

“All this information reveals is that Stewart is a wealthy woman,” Cedarbaum wrote. “Defendants cannot seriously contend that the jurors were not already aware of that.”

In a statement, Stewart lawyers Robert Morvillo and John J. Tigue said they disagreed with the ruling and planned to appeal errors that “deprived Martha Stewart of a fair trial.”

“We regret that a case about false statements was decided by a juror who appears to have made many false statements in an effort to gain access to the Stewart jury,” they said.

Lou Colasuonno, a spokesman for Bacanovic, said lawyers for Bacanovic “still believe these issues have merit and present solid grounds for appeal.”

But any appeal would be filed after a June 17 sentencing at which Stewart and Bacanovic are each expected to get 10 to 16 months in prison. Cedarbaum could allow them to spend up to half the time in home confinement.

Stewart and Bacanovic were convicted of conspiracy, making false statements and obstructing federal regulators. Bacanovic was also convicted of perjury.

No end in sight for high oil, gas prices

By **BRUCE STANLEY**
AP BUSINESS WRITER

LONDON (AP)—The price of oil is likely to remain high in coming months and could rise further, analysts say, due to ravenous global demand and petroleum producers’ reluctance to boost supplies.

Recent security problems in Saudi Arabia and Iraq have also inflamed markets.

On Tuesday, prices for oil and gasoline futures surged.

Crude for June delivery rose 77 cents on the New York Mercantile Exchange to \$38.98 per barrel, a new 13-year high, while unleaded gasoline for June delivery gained 4.4 cents to \$1.31 per gallon, the highest settlement since the contract started trading in December 1984.

June heating oil climbed 2.02 cents to settle at 98.81 cents per gallon. Natural gas futures climbed 3.8 cents to settle at \$6.269 per 1,000 cubic feet.

Increases in oil and gasoline futures typically cause pump prices to rise. Refineries are running flat out ahead of the peak summer driving season, but costlier crude makes it more expensive for them to produce gasoline.

The average price of regular unleaded gasoline in the United States is \$1.84 per gallon, according to the Energy Department, and analysts say the cost could rise as high as \$3 per gallon in some regional markets.

On Tuesday, contracts of North Sea Brent crude for June delivery soared by \$1.30 to \$35.78 per barrel in late trading on London’s International Petroleum Exchange. Markets rose after the U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, the world’s No. 1 oil exporter, advised Americans to leave the country following the weekend killings of five foreign workers at a petrochemical plant there.

“I think at this point you’re probably going to go through \$40. It could happen this week,” said Jan Stuart, head of energy research at the New York brokerage FIMAT USA.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, which pumps one-third of the world’s oil, has reaped a windfall from higher crude prices. OPEC insists that it aims for an average target price of \$25 per barrel for its benchmark blend of crudes, but the actual benchmark stood 37 percent higher than this at \$34.13 on Monday, the most recent day for which OPEC compiled data.

OPEC blames current high prices largely on speculators

and political tensions in the Middle East.

“The dark reality is that they want money, and their horizons are very short,” said Leo Drollas, chief economist at the Center for Global Energy Studies in London.

The center believes that OPEC leader Saudi Arabia now needs a benchmark price of at least \$30 per barrel to balance its government budget. To firm up prices, the group has kept supplies tight, most recently by approving a 4 percent cut in its output target starting last month.

OPEC’s strategy has forced importing nations to run down their oil inventories to unusually low levels, and this in turn has aggravated price volatility. Drollas argued that OPEC made matters worse by failing to anticipate China’s voracious appetite for imported oil and the resurgent demand in the United States.

As a result, he said, prices have risen relentlessly since December 2001, and the official OPEC price target—a range of \$22-\$28—is “as dead as a dodo.”

The International Energy Agency, a watchdog for oil importers, warned Monday that OPEC’s policy of tightly managing oil supplies is “dampening the current cyclical upturn” in the world economy. High crude prices are reinforcing high levels of unemployment for some industrialized nations and exacerbating budget deficits in many importing countries, the Paris-based agency said in a report.

The IEA amplified concerns that Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan expressed last week about the harmful effects that high prices for oil and natural gas might have on the U.S. economy.

“Greenspan is now saying that he’s concerned. I’ll vote with him,” said Adam Sieminski, an oil price strategist at Deutsche Bank in London.

So far, the global economy hasn’t suffered too much from costlier crude, but OPEC appears to be testing the market to see how far it can comfortably push prices, Sieminski said.

In the long run, higher prices tend to work against OPEC by making it profitable for competitors with higher production costs to pump more oil of their own. Any sharp increase in supplies can cause prices to crash.

But the summer driving season is looming, and analysts said upward pressure on oil prices will only grow in coming months.

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Asia

Afghan attack kills 3 election workers

By STEPHEN GRAHAM
AP WRITER

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)—Two British election workers and their Afghan interpreter were slain Wednesday in eastern Afghanistan, the first fatalities in a string of assaults on U.N. staff preparing for crucial balloting.

The United Nations said the killings would slow a drive to register some 10 million Afghans for the September vote, but officials promised to press on despite the surging Taliban-led violence.

The Britons were killed in Nuristan province, 100 miles east of the capital, Kabul, said Global Risk Strategies, a London-based security company. The company did not identify them but said they had been working with



SOURCES: Associated Press; ESRI AP

the United Nations.

A white U.N. helicopter brought the bodies to Kabul on Wednesday.

Global Risk Strategies said “local bandits” were believed to be behind the attack, but Afghan officials said it was unclear if it was a “criminal or a terrorist incident.”

“Unfortunately we have a lot of irresponsible armed people in this country,” Interior Minis-

try spokesman Latfulla Mashal said. “We don’t know who was behind it.”

However, President Hamid Karzai condemned what he called a “cowardly act aimed at terrorizing the people of Afghanistan” and disrupting the election.

“Afghanistan will continue relentlessly on the path that the people of the country have chosen: the path of peace prosperity and reconstruction,” his office said in a statement.

Nuristan, a rugged region of high peaks and forested valleys on the Pakistani border, has its share of bandits. But it is also a stronghold of renegade warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a top U.S. terror suspect.

Hekmatyar, a veteran of Afghanistan’s civil war, has joined remnants of the ousted Taliban regime in promising to drive



The United Nations helicopter which brought the bodies of two British election workers and their Afghan interpreter killed in eastern Aghanistan, lands at a military airport in Kabul, Wednesday, May 5, 2004.

out foreign troops and unseat Karzai, the U.S.-backed favorite in the election.

Farooq Wardak, the Afghan

government’s top election official, said the killings could have “very serious consequences” for the upcoming vote.

“The election wouldn’t have that much international credibility” without U.N. observers, Wardak said.

US sends Marines to Taliban stronghold

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)—The U.S. military has sent 2,000 Marines to a Taliban stronghold and wants a new Afghan militia to make up for a troop shortage in insurgency-roiled southern Afghanistan, a spokesman said Wednesday.

The Marines have deployed to the area around Tirin Kot, 250 miles southwest of the capital, Kabul, in Uruzgan province, Lt. Col. Tucker Mansager said.

Uruzgan, the home province of fugitive Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar and several of his key lieutenants, remains a stronghold of the ousted militia. Some observers believe the one-eyed Omar might still be in the province.

Lt. Col. Tucker Mansager said the Marines were a “surge force,” available to flood an area anywhere in the country at short notice.

The Afghan force will “help increase security and stability in a region where right now we don’t have enough forces to provide that security,” Mansager said.

He expressed frustration at Afghan officials in the troubled south, urging them to report militant attacks in time for U.S. forces to respond “rather than after the fact.”

More than 300 people have died in violence across Afghanistan so far this year, including 10 Afghan soldiers found dead Monday in southern Afghanistan after being abducted in two raids by suspected Taliban militants.

Pakistan says US troops enter tribal region

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP)—U.S. soldiers strayed into Pakistani territory while hunting al-Qaida and Taliban suspects in southeastern Afghanistan but returned across the border after Pakistani troops told them where they were, a military official said Wednesday.

American soldiers in at least three military vehicles entered Pakistan’s Lowara Mandi town in the North Waziristan tribal region Sunday evening, said

Pakistan army spokesman Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan. The U.S. troops came 200-300 yards inside Pakistan across a rugged, mountainous border that is not clearly marked, he said.

Such incidents are highly sensitive. President Gen. Pervez Musharraf is a staunch U.S. ally but has steadfastly refused to allow American soldiers to operate on his territory, fearing a backlash from religious conservatives.

Pakistan, which has deployed about 70,000 troops along its border with Afghanistan, has rejected American requests for the right of “hot pursuit” to follow terror suspects over the border while engaged in combat.

“We feel it was an inadvertent crossing,” Sultan said. “It could not be termed hot pursuit.”

But Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry viewed the incident more seriously. Ministry spokesman Masood Khan said the govern-

ment has lodged a protest with the United States and demanded an inquiry into the incident.

“We have protested to the U.S. authorities, both through the diplomatic and military channels,” he said.

The incursion came as U.S. and Afghan officials criticized a Pakistani offer to grant amnesty to terror suspects in return for renouncing violence. Lt. Gen. David Barno, the top American commander in Af-

ghanistan, said Tuesday that a policy of appeasement would only delay an inevitable battle with the terrorists.

But Khan strongly objected to the criticism.

“We appreciate the advice that has been given by the American general. We have heard him out, but we are making our own decisions,” he said.

“The political track is as important as the operational track here.”

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Some candidates in Philippines court poor

By JIM GOMEZ
AP WRITER

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—The reeking mountains of garbage in this Manila dump typically invite only swarms of flies and an army of scavengers who dig for junk or scraps of food under the brutal sun.

But a presidential vote Monday has turned the sprawling dump—known, fittingly, as “Aroma”—into a crucial election battleground, and politicians have been stopping by with plenty of promises.

Colorful bunting and campaign posters cover the slums that have sprouted near Aroma. People who normally scavenge through the great, dark mounds of trash are getting handouts of rice, sardines, coffee and cheap instant noodles from politicians seeking their votes.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, in a tight race with former action star Fernando Poe Jr., has visited with offers of everything from jobs to drinking water loaded in container trucks adorned with large streamers and her smiling portrait. In Aroma and nearby slums, Arroyo and Poe posters compete for space.

But residents here are largely skeptical of politicians’ claims. In a country where the millions of poor have long been courted

by candidates but rarely see their lots improve, they’ve heard it before.

“They’re quick to make promises to get our votes, but once they’re in power, they’ll disappear,” said Apiel Tanael, a 62-year-old father of four.

“We’re still here, enduring everything,” said Tanael, who first dug garbage and even lived in a slum on the slopes of nearby Smokey Mountain, a heap of decades-old trash that the government closed in 1995 to erase a notorious symbol of the country’s wrenching poverty.

Aroma was initially opened as a garbage transfer station to accommodate Manila’s refuse, which was brought in, loaded onto barges to be taken across Manila Bay. But the filth in Aroma grew into huge piles of garbage similar to Smokey Mountain - also a popular campaign stop in its day.

Despite the attention, many residents seem oblivious to the election. On a humid summer morning, garbage-filled trucks arrived, whipping clouds of dust and drawing throngs of scavengers. By noon, some were already reeking of gin and beer, singing raucously in a ramshackle hut turned into a karaoke bar.

Violeta Chavez, a 33-year-old housewife, didn’t register to vote, saying she could not afford



AP
Opposition Presidential candidate Fernando Poe Jr. shakes hands with supporters as his campaign caravan goes around the streets of Manila on Wednesday May 5, 2004.

to leave the dump long enough to cast a ballot.

“If I don’t work for a day, we won’t have anything to eat,” Chavez said as a small daughter tugged at her grimy skirt.

The rampant poverty in this Southeast Asian nation of 84 million people fuels raging Marxist and Muslim separatist

rebellions. It’s also been a boon and bane to presidents.

Backing from the poor has been largely credited for the 1998 electoral victory of President Joseph Estrada, adored by impoverished Filipinos for action film roles as champion of the oppressed. When Estrada was ousted over corruption al-

legations three years later, he accused a clique led by Roman Catholic Church leaders, wealthy families and Arroyo of plotting his ouster.

Tens of thousands of his poor followers stormed the heavily guarded Malacanang presidential palace after his arrest, demanding his reinstatement. The

rioting that followed killed six people.

It’s not surprising, then, that the poor would support Poe—Estrada’s best friend - in this election. The poor make up a majority of the more than 40 million registered Filipino voters.

However, Poe saw what high regard slum-dwellers hold for politicians’ promises when he appeared at a star-studded political rally at a nearby shantytown several weeks ago. Aides threw candy to onlookers, who replied with shouts of “Water! Water!” They didn’t get any.

Residents in Aroma said they would vote for any politician who would leave them alone in their squatter shacks or build permanent homes for them if they’re driven away.

Jovelyn Garcera, a 31-year-old mother of two, spoke of rumors that their homes will be demolished or burned down to make way for a seaport project once the voting is over.

Garcera is a leader of an association of 279 families of scavengers who failed to get low-cost houses in a community called “Paradise Heights” built by the government for squatters who used to live atop Smokey Mountain.

“We’ll vote for anybody who will give us homes,” she said. “Our only wish is not to pass on this suffering to our children.”

CLUB JAMA

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Pakistan uncovers plot to hijack plane

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP)—Pakistani intelligence has uncovered a plot by a small band of terrorists to hijack and possibly blow up a plane bound for the United Arab Emirates, the prime minister said Wednesday, prompting the nation to put

its airports on “red alert.” Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali told The Associated Press that authorities believe there was a group of about four to six people who wanted to hijack a plane. Intelligence indicated they wanted to blow it up, he said.

Hong Kong opposition: Tung blocking reform

HONG KONG (AP)—Pro-democracy lawmakers on Thursday accused Hong Kong leader Tung Chee-hwa of blocking democratic development by imposing guidelines on political reforms.

“All those guidelines are in fact obstacles to democracy,” said opposition lawmaker Frederick Fung, referring to the nine reform guidelines Tung recommended in a report that Beijing recently endorsed.

Fung introduced a motion in Hong Kong’s legislature on Wednesday to reject the guidelines, including one that says any proposal for political reforms must be in line with Beijing’s wishes.

But Pro-Beijing and big-business lawmakers, who dominate the legislature and typically side with the government, voted down the nonbinding motion with a 33-22 vote.

Hong Kong’s mini-constitution, the Basic Law, sets out full democracy as an eventual goal but gives no timetable.

Earlier this month, China rejected popular hopes to al-

low direct elections for Hong Kong’s leader in 2007 and the territory’s entire legislature in 2008, saying a quick move toward democracy would be a threat to political stability and the economy. It also endorsed Tung’s report that critics say will stifle democratic aspirations.

On Wednesday, opposition lawmakers also attacked Tung for failing to consult the public before submitting his report. But that immediately drew fire from pro-government legislators, accusing them of wasting time arguing the past but ignoring the need to start actual reform discussion.

Ordinary citizens in Hong Kong, a former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997, enjoy western-style freedoms but have no say in picking their own leader. The highly unpopular Tung was chosen by a committee loyal to Beijing. Only 24 of Hong Kong’s 60 sitting lawmakers were directly elected—although that number will rise to 30 in September elections.

There was no indication when the plot was due to be carried out or if it involved al-Qaida. Jamali would not speculate on whether the hijackers were Pakistanis or foreigners.

“Hijackers have no nationality,” he said.

A senior official at Pakistan’s intelligence agency said authorities are not sure who the men are.

“If we had their names and nationalities or other information about their whereabouts, they would have been arrested already,” he said on condition of anonymity.

Details of the plot came a day after Pakistan announced it was beefing up security at 35 airports nationwide. Access to airport

facilities has been severely restricted, extra security checks are being made on all domestic and international passengers and more security personnel have been assigned to the airports, said Maj. Mohammed Riaz, assistant director of intelligence for the Pakistan Airport Security Force.

“We got the information from our intelligence network, not from a threatening phone call or letter,” Riaz said. “We don’t know what group it is. We can’t say whether it is al-Qaida.”

No flights have been canceled because of the alert, Jamali said.



Jamali

“Naturally when one gets some hint about (a plot) or one gets a feeler or is informed directly or indirectly, I think this high alert is a must,” Jamali said.

The United Arab Emirates is the main financial hub of the Arab world. Dubai is also a regional transit hub and there are about 20 flights a day from the Pakistani cities of Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore. Pakistan International Airlines, Emirates airlines, Gulf Air, Malaysian Air and Aeroasia fly to the Emirates from Pakistan.

In March, the U.S. Embassy

in Abu Dhabi and the consulate in Dubai briefly shut their doors after receiving a “specific threat,” though there was no indication it was connected to the recent Pakistani alert.

Interior Ministry spokesman Abdul Rauf Chaudhry told AP that a Pakistani intelligence agency issued the recent warning. He also would not say whether the men were believed to be al-Qaida.

Chaudhry said no arrests have been made and airports nationwide continue to be “on red alert.”

Pakistan has been beset by a string of terror attacks since President Gen. Pervez Musharraf threw his support behind the United States’ war on terror following the Sept. 11 attacks.

Golkar wins Indonesian parliamentary vote

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP)—The party of former Indonesian dictator Suharto won the most seats in last month’s parliamentary election with 21.6 percent, a major blow to President Megawati Sukarnoputri, according to final results released Wednesday.

Analysts said the result would hurt Megawati’s chances of gaining a second term in July presidential elections. Indonesians are believed to be unhappy with her failure to improve the stagnant economy.

Golkar Chairman Slamet Effendi Yusuf said voters were convinced that his party had transformed itself into a democratic institution after serving as Suharto’s political machine for three decades.

“The result shows that the Indonesian people believe Golkar is the party that has the competence to take Indonesia out of its economic crisis,” Yusuf said.

Megawati’s Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle was second with 18.5 percent in the

April 5 balloting, the National Election Commission said. It was a sharp turnaround after her party won more than a third of the votes in 1999—the first free ballot after the overthrow of Suharto’s 32-year dictatorship.

The results bore out earlier estimates. According to the final tally, the National Awakening Party of former President Abdurrahman Wahid came in third, with 10.57 percent. It was followed by the United Development Party of Vice President Hamzah Haz with 8.15 and the Democratic Party of leading presidential contender Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono with 7.45 percent.

The Muslim-based Prosperous Justice Party and the National Mandate Party garnered 7.43 and 6.44 percent respectively. Six other parties won between 2 percent and 5 percent.

The final distribution of seats in the 550-member House of Representatives and Regional Representative Council—the upper chamber of the legislature—will be decided this week.

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Thailand leader heads to violence-wracked south

BANGKOK, Thailand (AP)—Thailand’s prime minister headed to the Muslim-dominated south Thursday to visit families of alleged militants killed by security forces last week in an unprecedented bloodbath, amid reports that insurgents were planning suicide missions.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, accompanied by his cousin, army chief Gen. Chaisith Shinawatra, planned to stay overnight in the Krong Pinang area, one of the 12 places where police and troops were attacked by waves of machete-wielding militants on April 28. The government retaliation—criticized as unnecessarily brutal—left 107 people dead.

“The security forces are ready to provide safety and facilities to the prime minister,” police Lt. Gen. Proong Bunpadung, commander of the regional police, told reporters.

“Ignore rumors that terrorist are plotting to hurt him. They intend to hurt the police more than the leader,” he said.

The army has secured the house of a local official, Narongporn na Phatthalung, for Thaksin, who wanted to spend the night in the most dangerous area in the south, The Bangkok Post newspaper reported.

He will earlier visit the families of the 19 people who were shot and killed when they attacked a police checkpoint in Suso village in Songkhla province, the Post said.

Thaksin said that intelligence officials advised him not make the visit, and that he was ignoring their advice: “If I canceled my trip, the morale of people will become worse.”

The government sent about 1,400 more troops this week to join about 2,500 there already following the April 28 carnage, the worst single day of killings in Thailand’s recent history. Five security personnel were also killed.

The identity of the attackers remains unclear. Army officials have described them as Islamic separatists while Thaksin has said drug dealers and other criminals are using religion to recruit youngsters.

The Post, quoting unidentified police sources, reported Thursday that some 200 to 300 young men are likely to attack security checkpoints, sentry boxes and operating bases, with some of them strapped with grenades that they would use to kill themselves and others.

It did not say when the attacks would happen and

whether Thaksin was in danger of being targeted.

The provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala are home to most of the country’s 3 million Muslim minority in the predominantly Buddhist Thailand. Songkhla has a substantial Muslim minority population. A separatist insurgency simmered in the south for decades before dying down in the late 1980s.

It gathered pace this year, fueled, according to experts, by government indifference toward the region’s economic development, lack of education opportunities, suppression of the local Islamic-Malay culture and the heavy handed attitude of the largely Buddhist security forces.

“We welcome the prime minister’s visit,” said Abdulloh Maejaesae, a member of the Yala province’s Islamic Council. “But we do not know if that can help he shattered morale of the people. The sense of mistrust still prevails. The villagers are more scared of authorities than of thieves,” Abdulloh said.

The April 28 violence came after four months of almost daily attacks on policemen, teachers, government officials and others from the Buddhist establishment that had left 97 people dead.

Indians say they were held in Iraq by US

COCHIN, India (AP)—Four Indians said Wednesday they were held against their will by U.S. troops in Iraq to do menial work in an Army camp amid insurgent attacks.

The U.S. Embassy said it was investigating the report.

Aliyarkunj Faisal, Abdul Aziz Shahjehan, Haniffa Mansool and Hameed Abdul Hafiz told The Associated Press they signed up in August with a recruiting agency to work for a caterer in Kuwait.

When they reached the Kuwait airport, a U.S. soldier ordered them to board a bus that took them to a base near the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, they said.

“There were some 20 Indians in the bus. Once we knew that we were inside Iraq, we protested,” Faisal said. “But the Americans told us that they had paid a Kuwait agency \$1,000 for each man and therefore it was a must that we work for them.”

Shahjehan said the camp, which he could not name, often was the target of missile

attacks by Iraqi fighters.

“Every time the camp was attacked, we took shelter in a bunker. The fear of seeing so many bomb explosions still haunts me,” he said, adding that the Army also gave them training on how to remain alert and get into bunkers.

Shahjehan said the four—all Muslims—were forced to do menial jobs, including washing clothes.

“When I refused to work and told an officer that I wanted to go back, he beat me up,” Shahjehan said.

Faisal said the men were promised \$890 a month in Kuwait but instead made \$200 from the Army in Iraq.

“It was a pitiful life. We lost all our money,” he said.

Faisal said 16 Indians got together and escaped April 15 by paying \$20 to an Iraqi truck driver, who took them to Baghdad. He said the Indian High Commission there helped them fly to Amman, Jordan, and then back to Bombay.

“I shudder at the thought that I lived amid missile attacks and gun fighting for months,” said Faisal, 26, who, along with the three others, returned Monday to their village of Velichakala, 90 miles south of Cochin, a major city in Kerala state.

The Indian government has demanded an explanation from Washington.

David Kennedy, spokesman for the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, told the AP that officials were investigating.

“We have seen the reports and are looking into them. We take all reports of abuse seriously and all allegations of mistreatment are investigated,” Kennedy said. “We are committed to treating all persons under coalition authority with dignity, respect and humanity.”

The allegations by the Indians come on top of international condemnation of the treatment of Iraqi prisoners by the U.S. military.

11 killed in China shelves collapse

BEIJING (AP)—Storage shelves stacked high with garlic collapsed in central China, burying 30 workers and killing 11 of them, state media reported Thursday.

The accident Wednesday morning in Henan province prompted a large rescue opera-

tion to dig out workers weighed down by the massive pile of garlic shoots and broken shelving, the Beijing Times and other newspapers reported.

The workers were stacking produce at Chenzhai Cold Storage in the city of Zhengzhou when shelves piled 10 meters

(30 feet) high with garlic shoots collapsed, the reports said.

Police have detained the storage facility’s owner, identified only by the surname Zhang, the reports said.

Zhengzhou is about 660 kilometers (400 miles) southwest of Beijing.

World

US soldier, 15 Iraqis killed in Iraq

By SCHEHEREZADE FARAMARZI
AP WRITER

NAJAF, Iraq (AP)—U.S.-led forces launched their biggest assault yet against militiamen loyal to a radical Shiite cleric, raiding hideouts in several cities Wednesday and clashing with gunmen in the world’s biggest cemetery. At least 15 Iraqis and a U.S. soldier were killed.

Moderate Shiites tried to persuade anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr to back away from his confrontation with the United States—a reflection of their growing concern.

Skirmishes between U.S. troops and al-Sadr’s al-Mahdi Army militia have grown deadlier recently as the military steps up pressure on the cleric while trying to avoid an offensive in the Shiite holy city of Najaf.

“The operation will continue until the goal of eliminating and disarming al-Sadr’s militia is met,” Polish forces spokesman Lt. Col. Robert Strzelecki said. “I think that will take place soon.”

The militiamen also have increased attacks, apparently to push the United States into negotiations or goad it into an offensive that could rally other Shiites behind al-Sadr.

Iraqi Governing Council member Mohammed Bahr al-Ulloum delivered a message to al-Sadr from a group of influential Shiites calling on his militia to disarm and leave Najaf, council member Raja Habib Al-Khuzai told The Associated Press.

The message from the group—made up of about 500 Shiites,

including local council members, tribal officials and others—represented the most public effort by Shiite leaders to push al-Sadr into making concessions to end the standoff, which began when his militia launched an uprising in early April.

Meanwhile, the director of Abu Ghraib prison promised to open the facility to the international Red Cross and the Iraqi Interior and Human Rights ministries amid an outcry over abuse of Iraqi prisoners.

Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller also apologized for the “illegal or unauthorized acts” committed by a “small number of our soldiers” at Abu Ghraib, where photographs showed stripped and hooded Iraqis being abused by U.S. guards.

President Bush went on two Arabic-language TV stations to try to assuage outrage across the Middle East over the abuse. Bush condemned the prisoners’ treatment as “abhorrent” and pledged that those found guilty “will be brought to justice”—but stopped short of an apology.

The heaviest fighting in the south—part of the military’s Operation Iron Saber—came in the holy city of Karbala, where coalition forces raided a hotel, the local former Baath Party headquarters and the regional governor’s office, where al-Sadr fighters had been stockpiling weapons, Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt said.

In the overnight raid on the governor’s office, troops came under fire, Kimmitt said in Baghdad. He said 10 al-Sadr



followers were killed.

The U.S. soldier died when a dump truck tried to ram a checkpoint in Karbala, the military said. He was the 20th U.S. serviceman killed in Iraq in May.

Outside the city of Kufa, U.S. forces attacked a van where Iraqis were seen unloading weapons.

The vehicle was destroyed and five Iraqis were killed, Kimmitt said.

In Najaf, U.S. troops battled al-Mahdi Army fighters outside a cemetery near the Imam Ali Shrine, Iraq’s holiest Shiite site.

The soldiers opened fire with machine guns on militiamen who had ambushed them.

Medics from the 31st Combat Support Hospital pray Saturday, April 17, 2004, with Army Chaplain Capt. Dawud Agbere, second from right, during last rites for a soldier who died under fire near Baghdad, Iraq. From left: Spc. Scott Gillis, Sgt. First Class Karen Fish, the chaplain and Medical Director Maj. Dr. John Hammock, right.

AP/THE WASHINGTON POST

Official apologizes for abuse of inmates

ABUGHRAIB, Iraq (AP)—The commander of U.S.-run prisons in Iraq apologized Wednesday for the abuse of prisoners by American guards and said he will invite observers from the Red Cross and Iraqi government into Abu Ghraib prison.

Inmates shouted protests about mistreatment as Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller led journalists through the lockup, the scene of photographs that showed Iraqi prisoners being abused by smiling U.S. guards.

“I would like to apologize for our nation and for our military for the small number of soldiers who committed illegal or unauthorized acts here at Abu Ghraib,” Miller told the reporters. “These are violations not only of our national policy but of how we conduct ourselves as members of the international community.”

Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt,

the spokesman for the U.S. command, also apologized. “My Army has been embarrassed by this. My Army has been shamed by this.”

President Bush addressed the Arab world on television, but stopped short of saying he was sorry. He said the abuses were “abhorrent” and do not represent “the America that I know.”

The Army says it’s conducting criminal probes of 10 prisoner deaths in U.S. custody in Afghanistan and Iraq, beyond two already ruled homicides. And a U.S. intelligence official, who requested anonymity, said the CIA is investigating two more deaths. That brought to 14 the number of prisoner deaths blamed on Americans or under U.S. investigation.

Miller said there were “some deaths” at Abu Ghraib and they were being investigated.

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AP

Police investigators search the area behind a police station in Athens on Wednesday, May 5, 2004.

Bombs hit Athens 100 days before Olympics

ATHENS, Greece (AP)—Greece's attempts to calm security fears about the Summer Olympics were rocked by three bombs that exploded before dawn Wednesday—100 days before the games begin.

The government assigned top anti-terrorist agents to investigate the bombings, which caused no injuries after damaging a suburban police station.

Officials insisted there was no link to the Aug. 13-29 Olympics and were likely carried out by self-styled anarchists or other domestic extremists.

The timing of the blasts, however, offered multiple Olympic ties.

Wednesday began the 100-day countdown to the opening ceremony. A Greek delegation,

led by the public order minister and the head of the Greek police, is in Washington for talks on how to safeguard the first summer Olympics since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

On Monday, the IOC is to begin its final review of Athens' preparations, which have been beset by construction delays and other glitches.

Premier Costas Caramanlis called the bombing "an isolated incident which does not affect whatsoever the safety of the Olympic preparation."

Greece's anti-terrorist units took over the investigation. Police said foot patrols and other surveillance would be increased.

"I don't think panic is created

by this kind of small incident," Athens Mayor Dora Bakoyiani said in Paris, where she was promoting the city.

But worries still loom despite organizers' security spending of more than \$1.2 billion, including assistance from NATO.

"It's definitely got caught up in my head," said defending Olympic tennis gold medalist Venus Williams, who has said she is looking forward to competing in Athens.

"I'll just hope for the best and say my prayers—for everyone in general," she said from the German Open in Berlin.

U.S. pole vaulter Stacy Dragila said she's aware "there's a possibility of terrorist attacks. It is scary for the world at this time."

Human error said to cause Bosnia crash

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP)—Errors by the crew caused the crash that killed Macedonia's president and eight others on board two months ago, officials announced Wednesday.

A 75-page report produced by Bosnian, Macedonian, U.S. and NATO investigators said the aircraft was functioning perfectly. But the two-man crew—a pilot and a co-pilot—miscalculated key flight data in stormy weather.

"The immediate causes ... were procedural mistakes of

the crew in regard to location and height while approaching Mostar airport," Branko Dokic, Bosnia's transport and communications minister.

According to the report, the crew lowered the plane and embarked on its final approach curve to the airport too soon in relation to the distance to the runway.

At another point the plane lost the beacon signal from the airport for 18 seconds—which normally should lead to an aborted approach. But the pilots decided to try to land anyway.

The plane crashed against a

hill about five miles south of the Mostar airport, killing President Boris Trajkovski, six of his associates and the two pilots.

Elected in 1999, Trajkovski was Macedonia's second head of state since the former Yugoslav republic gained independence in 1991.

When fighting erupted in 2001 between ethnic Albanian insurgents and government troops, Trajkovski helped steer the nation toward a peace deal that met the rebels' demands in exchange for an end to hostilities.

US Navy loses mini-sub off Norway coast

OSLO, Norway (AP)—The U.S. Navy has been searching for nearly a week for a high-tech miniature unmanned submarine that vanished during a military exercise off Norway, the Norwegian military said Wednesday.

The 11-foot submarine was being tested off Norway when it failed to surface last Thursday, Norwegian military spokesman Cmdr. Thom Knustad told The Associated Press.

The mini-sub, or Battlespace Preparation Autonomous Underwater Vehicle, is programmed before being launched to search

for mines and, if necessary, destroy them.

This one didn't return as planned to its mother ship, the USS Swift, a minesweeper. The Swift broke off participation in a military exercise to find the submarine.

The ship has searched everywhere from the fjord leading into the southern town of Kristiansand to deep ocean water some 20 miles out, where the waters can be as much as 1,900 feet deep, Knustad said.

"It's like looking for a needle in a haystack," Knustad said, adding they weren't sure if it sank.

The Swift usually has highly trained dolphins aboard to help search for mines, leading some Norwegian media to speculate the animals were being used to find the missing mini-sub.

"I've gotten limited information from the U.S. Navy, and I can't confirm the use of dolphins," Knustad said.

Because the sub could surface just about anywhere along Norway's coast, Knustad appealed on national radio for Norwegians to be on the lookout for the torpedo-shaped, yellowish-orange device with a propeller on one end.

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Israel attacks suspected Lebanon hideout

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP)—Israeli warplanes fired missiles at a suspected guerrilla hideout in south Lebanon on Wednesday, shortly after Hezbollah gunners fired on Israeli jets, security officials said.

The Lebanese officials in southern Lebanon said two Israeli fighter jets fired a total of four missiles at a valley near the village of Zibqine, seven miles southeast of the port city of Tyre and four miles north of the Israeli border.

Hezbollah officials in south Lebanon said at least four air-to-surface missiles were launched in the afternoon attack.

Black smoke billowed from the area. There was no immediate word on casualties.

In Israel, the army said jets “targeted and destroyed” two Hezbollah posts.

The Israeli airstrike, the first in south Lebanon since March, came two hours after Hezbollah anti-aircraft guns fired on Israeli warplanes flying over the region.

Earlier Wednesday, shells from Hezbollah anti-aircraft fire landed on an Israeli community along the border, the Israeli army said. No one was hurt.

The Lebanese army command said four Israeli planes fighter jets violated Lebanese airspace over southern and central Lebanon,

A Palestinian man walks on top of an Israeli tank with soldiers inside, during an Israeli army operation in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, Wednesday May 5, 2004. One Palestinian security officer was killed and 16 people injured, including an ambulance medic and a news photographer, in the operation.

and anti-aircraft batteries “confronted” them before the planes returned to Israel.

Lebanon repeatedly has complained to the United Nations about Israeli reconnaissance flights, and Hezbollah has made it policy to retaliate for Israeli overflights by firing anti-aircraft fire at the planes. Some of the shells crash across the border in Israel.

The Israeli military said Hezbollah has continued to target Israeli towns “under the guise of anti-aircraft fire.”

“The state of Israel is determined not to allow terror acts emanating from the border with Lebanon,” the army said.

The last Israeli airstrike in Lebanon was March 23, when Israeli helicopter gunships fired on gunmen in the south, killing two and wounding one. The gunmen were preparing to launch rockets into Israel, according to Lebanese security officials.



Report: Ministry funded illegal outposts

JERUSALEM (AP)—Israel’s Housing Ministry has spent millions of dollars on unauthorized construction in the West Bank, a government report said Wednesday, leading the attorney general to impose a new way of monitoring settlement spending.

Also Wednesday, the Palestinian legislature fired a high-ranking official it accused of corruption. It was the first time lawmakers dismissed a senior official for corruption.

In Gaza, two Palestinians were killed and 16—including a news photographer—were wounded in Israeli-Palestinian violence. In the West Bank, an armed Hamas fugitive was shot dead by troops.

Also, Israel released a co-founder of Hamas, Mohammed Taha, after holding him for 14 months without charges. Taha, accused by the army of leading Hamas’ military wing, was arrested in a raid on the Boureij refugee camp in central Gaza.

The report, issued by the watchdog state comptroller, detailed how the Housing Ministry funneled about \$6.5 million for illegal construction, more than half of it to unauthorized outposts.

Attorney General Meni Mazuz ordered an unprecedented freeze on funding for settlement construction, charging that settlements were diverting state funds to the outposts.

The Justice Ministry announced Wednesday that Mazuz had lifted last month’s ordered freeze after approving a monitoring system to ensure government money is not used for illegal projects.

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UN to hold session on Iraq resolution

By EDITH M. LEDERER
AP WRITER

UNITED NATIONS (AP)—The U.N. Security Council will hold a “brainstorming” session Thursday on a new Iraq resolution to deal with the complex relationship between the interim Iraqi government that takes power on June 30 and the international community.

A draft is not expected until after U.N. envoy Lakhdar Brahimi returns from his next visit to Iraq with recommendations on a transitional government, council diplomats said Wednesday.

The United States is pushing for a new U.N. resolution on Iraq to be approved before the coalition hands over power next month to encourage more countries to contribute peace-keeping troops.

“What we want to do is listen to delegations and see what we all agree on, so we know where to start,” said Richard Grenell, spokesman for U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte. “It’s also important to note that Brahimi’s plan for the next steps is a crucial factor in drafting the resolution, so we’re not in the drafting phase yet.”

Diplomats said last month that Britain’s U.N. Ambassador Emyr Jones Parry sketched out five issues that London and Washington believe a new

resolution should address: The end of the occupation, future political arrangements, the enhanced U.N role in Iraq, the continued military presence and legal issues arising from the transfer of power.

According to Brahimi’s plan, the U.S.-picked Iraqi Governing Council will be dissolved on June 30 and a caretaker government comprising a prime minister, president and two vice presidents will oversee Iraq until national elections are held by the end of January 2005.

The informal meeting of the 15 council nations at Britain’s U.N. Mission on Thursday was described by one council diplomat as a “brainstorming” session to go over the key elements that should be in a resolution.

A potential problem issue will be the continued presence of the U.S.-led force to maintain security after the handover.

The United States anticipates a new resolution will acknowledge the arrangements for the interim government, outline a role for the United Nations and make clear that all responsibilities of the Coalition Provisional Authority will be transferred to the interim government, Grenell said.

This includes control of the Development Fund for Iraq, which was set up by the United States and Britain. The fund receives all revenue from the sale of Iraqi oil and assets frozen during Saddam Hussein’s regime, he said. The proceeds are supposed to go to reconstruction.

“We expect the resolution to extend a hand of support to the new interim government, to specifically address the end of occupation, to support the political transition and to encourage other nations and regional organizations to get involved in security and reconstruction efforts,” Grenell said.

The Security Council adopted a resolution on Oct. 16 that authorizes “a multinational force under unified command to take all necessary measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq.” It also urges the 191 U.N. member states to contribute military forces.

Negroponte, who will become the U.S. ambassador to Iraq after the handover, said last month that the force will remain under U.S. command because the Iraqis weren’t able yet “to fully exercise their powers” in the field of security.

One council diplomat said nobody had yet come up with a “magic solution” on how a fully sovereign government can have a multinational force providing security.

One possible model could be South Korea, the diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity.



First wife of Nelson Mandela dies at 82

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP)—Evelyn Mandela, the first wife of former President Nelson Mandela, has died. She was 82.

She died Friday of respiratory illness, according to news reports.

Born Evelyn Mase, Mandela was the deeply religious daughter of a mineworker and a cousin of the late Walter Sisulu, one of the giants of the liberation struggle who was imprisoned with Nelson Mandela.

She married Nelson Mandela in 1944 and the couple had four children. One daughter died in 1948 before she was a year old, and a son was killed in a car accident in 1969 while Nelson Mandela was in prison.

It was unclear where their other two children were.

The couple divorced in 1955 because of what Nelson Mandela, in his autobiography, “Long Walk to Freedom,” called irreconcilable differences between politics and religion.

He said he was not willing to give up his work in the anti-apartheid struggle and that she could not live with his devotion to something other than her and the family.

She raised their children largely on her own.

Nelson Mandela next married Winnie Madikizela; they divorced in 1996. He is now married to Graca Machel, the widow of the former president of Mozambique.

Abashidze said to depart from Georgia

BATUMI, Georgia (AP)—Protesters celebrated in the streets early Thursday after their leaders said that Adzharian leader Aslan Abashidze had left the Black Sea province with a high-ranking Russian official.

There was no official announcement of

Abashidze’s departure, but his talks with Russian Security Council head Igor Ivanov ended after midnight. Ivanov had arrived in the provincial capital several hours earlier to discuss the region’s rising tensions.

Concern over Adzharia soared this week after Abashidze on Sunday ordered the destruction of bridges connecting Adzharia with the rest of Georgia, a move he justified as necessary to prevent Georgian forces from taking control of the province.

President Mikhail Saakashvili raised the pressure on Wednesday by ordering the military to take over control of all internal border crossings with Adzharia.

Mexicans mark Cinco De Mayo with parade

MEXICO CITY (AP)—Mexico celebrated the 142nd anniversary of its victory over French forces Wednesday with a parade, battlefield re-enactments and cries of “Viva Mexico!”

The Cinco de Mayo holiday commemorates the May 5, 1862, defeat of French soldiers and their Mexican collaborators who advanced on the city of Puebla, 65 miles southwest of Mexico City.

The battle was indecisive, however. Troops sent by Napoleon III stormed Mexico City a year later, forcing the government of President Benito Juarez to flee.

Nonetheless, “The national forces covered themselves in glory,” President Vicente Fox said Wednesday during military ceremonies in Puebla. “The heroes of Puebla honored their flag and wrote a definitive page in national history.” Accompanying Fox was Mexican Defense Secretary Ricardo Vega Garcia.

Cinco de Mayo is not an official holiday in Mexico, but many government employees take the day off and banks are closed.

Annual celebrations also took place in Mexico City, but were most fervent in Puebla. Sword bearing re-enactors paraded down Cinco de Mayo Avenue, the city’s central thoroughfare, dressed in 19th Century French military regalia or as straw-hatted peasants, emphasizing Mexico’s underdog status at the time of the victory.

Science & Technology

WiFi: Flexibility comes relatively cheap

By ROB PEGORARO
THE WASHINGTON POST

At its most basic, WiFi is the Internet equivalent of a cordless phone. Instead of replacing a coiled-up phone cord, WiFi takes the place of Ethernet cable, the thick wiring that stretches under desks in offices.

Doesn't sound too exciting, does it?

But WiFi has done this basic job a little too well—it has made local area networking so cheap and (mostly) easy, people can set up networks in ways that would have been too difficult before. Few people would go to the trouble of connecting a computer to a stereo or giving away Internet access in a park if it meant littering Ethernet cable all over the place, but with WiFi those scenarios are eminently possible.

In that sense, WiFi is more Swiss Army knife than cordless phone. The downside of this? WiFi can be pretty hard for the uninitiated to grasp.

So for those who haven't tried out wireless networking yet, here's what you need to know.

First, realize that a WiFi network can't replace your existing Internet connection—it can only make it better by extending its reach beyond one outlet. You can take your laptop to the sofa for your Web browsing instead of being cabled to a desk.

You'll need two pieces of hardware to build a WiFi network. One is an access point, a book-sized device that shares your Internet connection by broadcasting a signal to computers as far as 150 feet away, but more likely several dozen feet (taking into account the way walls and floors can weaken the signal). Most cost about \$100.

The other is a receiver—a card or pod that plugs into a computer. Most new laptops include receivers already, but if you need to add one it should normally cost \$30 to \$70.

These gadgets come in two main flavors, called 802.11b and 802.11g in lieu of catchier names (those numbers and letters are how the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, the author of the standards governing WiFi's workings, catalogues its publications). 802.11b is the oldest, best-established form of WiFi; newer 802.11g gear can transfer data more quickly while still working with 802.11b hardware.

How much faster? 802.11b has an advertised speed of 11 million bits per second (Mbps), but the actual speed you get after subtracting for losses from overhead and interference is more like two to four Mbps. 802.11g's advertised speed is 54 Mbps—but for the same reasons, its real-world performance is closer to 20 Mbps. In networks that include both b and g hardware, g slows down still more.

Most people buy WiFi just to share an Internet connection, and for that purpose good old 802.11b is more than fast enough—most residential broadband connections max out at 1.5 Mbps. G's extra speed is useful only for sending lots of data between computers and the home network.

But even though 802.11g's speed may not yield any real benefit, you'll probably wind up buying it anyway. Older, slower b gear is getting hard to find while offering few savings compared to g devices, and—more important—almost all g hardware includes a much better security system.

Security matters in WiFi because your access point will broadcast every bit of data you send and receive online to anybody who cares to listen. Without some authentication system, you will also be inviting every random stranger with a laptop to hop on to your signal and borrow your bandwidth.

Older WiFi boxes include an encryption standard called WEP (Wired Equivalent Privacy) to prevent these things from happening, but WEP was soon discovered to be badly broken and easy to defeat in the field.

WiFi developers came up with a better encryption system called WPA (WiFi Protected Access), but this arrived too late to be added to many existing 802.11b devices.

Now on one hand, fretting about WiFi misses the point:

You are far likelier to lose your privacy or your data online because a virus, worm, spyware application or browser-hijacking Web site assaults your computer. On the other hand, that doesn't mean you should make it easy for the rest of the world to listen in to your traffic.

Because WiFi is a standard, not a brand, you don't need to buy all your hardware from one vendor. You can mix and match parts and they'll all—usually—work together.

When they don't, the fault is usually the too-complicated connection-management software provided with WiFi access points and receivers, whose quality can range from miserable to malevolent.

My second least-favorite category of WiFi software is the firmware updates manufacturers ship to add new capabilities to their access points and receivers. Not all of these get enough testing before their release.

For example, after Apple released a firmware update for

its AirPort Extreme WiFi devices last week, numerous users complained that it slowed or disrupted their WiFi networks. A chastened Apple suggested last week that an update to this update would be forthcoming soon.

My own rule for WiFi firmware updates is this: Wait a week and see if any reports of trouble show up online before you even think of installing it.

If you can keep your WiFi network out of trouble, though, you may be pleasantly surprised to see how easy it is to add new devices to it—and I don't just mean computers, but also printers, handheld organizers and even an emerging category of set-top boxes that stream digital music from your computer to your stereo.

There's a lot of creativity going into the WiFi space these days; some of the most interesting applications for WiFi probably haven't even been invented yet. I hope to read about them soon—from my couch.

ctsi

Life & Style

Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen face age 18

By ANTHONY BREZNICAN
AP ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

Sometimes two of a kind beats a “Full House.” Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen proved that by topping their childhood stint on that saccharine sitcom by starting a billion-dollar enterprise of direct-to-video movies, a little girl fashion line, and assorted books, dolls, trinkets and doodads.

Nearing their 18th birthdays, the two starlets are about to see whether their legions of fans are outgrowing them, or plan to follow them into adulthood.

“New York Minute” is the first feature film from the duo since 1995’s “It Takes Two,” when they were 9.

If it’s a big hit, “New York Minute” could show Hollywood that the Olsen twins are ticket-selling powerhouses like fellow teen stars Lindsay Lohan and Hilary Duff—but a catastrophic flop could also relegate them to the uncool, forgotten-in-the-toy-box status of Barney the purple dinosaur or the Teletubbies.

The girls, who have been famous since they were 9 months old, have an almost blase attitude about their fame, their future, their fortune and their wholesome image. They say they don’t calculate how to appeal to fans.

“We wouldn’t be successful if our fans didn’t like what we were doing,” said Ashley, who along with her sister is worth an estimated \$150 million each.

“I think this movie, and also with what we’ve done in the past, like just doing videos or books—it was never going toward a goal

or anything like that. It was just one more thing,” said Mary-Kate, who sets herself apart from her blond sister with long, curly hair dyed dark.

Ashley, who’s quieter and more classically refined than the Bohemian-lite, jangly jewelry-wearing Mary-Kate, credits their success to making movies that they’d like to watch, since their age was always the target demographic anyway.

“We’ve just kind of done what was comfortable for us in that time of our lives,” she said. “It was those preteen problems, and girls could relate to that.”

They recognized that “New York Minute” was a pivotal project for them—which is why they frontloaded the movie with comedians aimed at the young-adult crowd: Eugene Levy, Andy Richter and Darrell Hammond.

“(‘New York Minute’) does get our face out there and shows us to other people, older audiences who probably don’t go buy our videos or what we’ve done for the past couple years,” Mary-Kate said.

For all their success, the Olsen twins still have a stigma to overcome. Although some lecherous male fans have made sport of counting down the days until they turn 18 (on June 13) Mary-Kate and Ashley are still regarded by many as the realm of goofy little kids.

Consider Angelina Gaspar, a 20-year-old from Visalia, Calif., who traveled two hours to Los Angeles on April 29 to see Mary-Kate and Ashley get a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame:

“I get made fun of, but you



Ashley, left, and Mary-Kate Olsen pose for photographers outside the Tribeca Performing Arts Center Tuesday, May 4, 2004 in New York.

know what - that’s fine. Laugh all you want. At work, I’m the laughingstock of the store right now because I’m here. But you know what, when I come back I’m going to have pictures, I’m going to have an autograph, hopefully,” said Gaspar, who wore a T-shirt featuring the Olsen sisters from about age 10.

Gaspar said she plans to see “New York Minute” about 10 times in the theater.

Robert Thorne, the entertainment lawyer who founded the Olsen’s Dualstar Entertainment company and helped create the “Mary-Kate and Ashley” brand of products, dismissed the notion that they have something left to prove.

“Whatever naysayers are out there exist for any celebrity,” he said.

The publicity push for “New York Minute” has given them a sample of the gossip treatment that they have been relatively immune to for years because of their under-the-radar direct-to-video careers.

In Touch Weekly recently questioned whether the ultrape-tite twins had eating disorders, and tabloids routinely feature them with their respective boy-

friends.

Will the twins someday attempt to court new guy fans like other young actresses, posing in skimpy outfits in Maxim or similar magazines?

“I doubt it,” Thorne said. “I mean, the answer to that is no.”

But both girls bristle when asked about trying to preserve their wholesome image when they both go to New York University next fall.

“Everyone else kind of labeled us as that,” Ashley said. “We don’t consider ourselves perfect or wholesome—because no one is.”

“Or role models,” Mary-Kate added, wrinkling her face. “We like to think of ourselves more as ...”

“... Human beings?” Ashley suggests.

Mary-Kate shakes her head. “No, for our fans at least, (we’re like) friends, another teenage girl who’s gone through the same problems.”

Ashley nods in agreement.

Even if “New York Minute” is a hit, the girls will be forced to confront another question: How long do they continue to work as a pair? Will they be making twin movies for rest of their careers?

“They’re not Siamese twins

DERBY

CRM

Jackman strikes while the monsters are hot

By **RON DICKER**
SPECIAL TO THE HARTFORD COURANT

NEW YORK—When director Stephen Sommers asked Hugh Jackman to play the lead in his \$150 million monster romp “Van Helsing,” Jackman hesitated. He had just reprised his role as the Ginsu-clawed Wolverine in “X-Men 2,” and he felt his career was at a delicate juncture.

“I thought I was going to do a smaller independent movie after that to do something different,” he says. “I was reluctant to be in another summer popcorn movie.”

Jackman told Sommers, the creator of the modern “Mummy” series, that if “Van Helsing” became a hit, it was sure to spawn a sequel and generate more demands on his time. Then Sommers cut him off.

“I think you’re the only actor in Hollywood who’s nervous about being in two successful franchises,” Sommers told him.

Jackman, of course, finally agreed to do the titular part of the Dutch vampire slayer and occult expert, and his handsome mug will fill thousands of screens when the movie opens Friday to start the action-adventure season. It is no small honor that Jackman and co-star Kate Beckinsale’s names appear above the title, a first for Jackman, who can laugh his way to the bank over his fear of being too much of a star.

Since October, he has had a chance to show off his song-and-dance chops on Broadway as the flamboyant performer and fellow Australian Peter Allen in “The Boy From Oz.” Jackman, 35, had made his way to Hollywood on the strength of

his *Curly* in a 1998 London staging of “Oklahoma.” It also became the link to “Van Helsing.” In the audience one night was Bob Ducsay, who would later produce “Van Helsing” for Universal.

“Hugh couldn’t have been on the stage more than five minutes when I’m thinking, ‘Who is this guy?’ “ Ducsay says. “The level of charisma that he brought to the role, the strength that he brought to the role, the physicality he brought to the role in a musical, of all things, somehow seemed to apply here.” It also applied to “The Boy From Oz.” Jackman’s exuberance has overcome mixed reviews for the overall show. Already tabbed to host the Tony Awards for the second year on June 6, he is also likely to receive a Tony nomination when the candidates are announced May 10. Jackman has molded such a signature performance that producers have not bothered with an understudy when Jackman has gone on vacation or fallen ill.

That alone has made the pressure greater than headlining a big-budget movie.

“With the stage show, it’s changed in that, if I’m sick, the show’s off,” he says. “If I had a bad day filming, I could ask for a rescheduling. Reviews affect the show. Summer movies exist on a whole other level.”

So what has propelled him through the grind?

“B-12 shots, man, seriously, and a very understanding family,” he says.

Jackman is downsizing again for Darren Aronofsky’s new movie, “The Fountain,” in which he plays three characters in a tale that revolves around



Hugh Jackman takes on the title role of Van Helsing.

the Fountain of Youth. Jackman recently made a short film directed by his wife, Deborra-Lee Furness, called “Standing Room Only,” about a line of people outside a West End theater.

He and Furness, with whom he starred on the Australian TV series “Corelli,” have an adopted son Oscar, who makes a brief appearance in Jackman’s arms at the end of the interview. Jackman had said he would slow down his career for Furness, who is 8 years his senior, to work on her own aspirations, but the pressure for him to strike while he remains hot appears too intense for him to relent now.

Discussions have begun for “X-Men 3” and a juicy rumor has floated about him becoming the next James Bond. He says he started the gossip with a “facetious” comment but now the idea does not seem so far-fetched.

“There’s always that fantasy in every boy,” he says.

Her Majesty’s Secret Service certainly did not have to deal with Dracula, Frankenstein’s monster and the Wolf Man in the same movie, however. That is Jackman’s task in “Van Helsing.” He retained Van Helsing’s Dutch accent from the horror classics but his version is younger and more studly. But not too young, according to Sommers.

“We needed a man,” the director says. “If you look around, it’s really hard right now. There’s a lot of good, younger boys, if you will. And there’s a lot of older male actors. Hugh’s in that special place. To get a 30ish actor who’s really great looking and a fantastic actor, that’s really rare.”

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Picasso painting nets \$104M at auction

NEW YORK (AP)—Pablo Picasso’s 1905 painting “Boy with a Pipe” sold for \$104 million Wednesday at Sotheby’s, shattering the record for an auctioned painting.

The total includes the auction price of \$93 million plus the auction house’s commission of about \$11 million.

“This is the finest work in private hands that was going to be available for sale,” Sotheby’s senior vice president David Norman said.

The previous record was set by Vincent van Gogh’s 1890 “Portrait of Doctor Gachet,” which

was sold to a Japanese billionaire for \$82.5 million in 1990 at Christie’s. That price included the auction house’s premium.

Sotheby’s did not say who bought “Boy with a Pipe.”

A 24-year-old Picasso painted “Boy with a Pipe” soon after settling in Montmartre, France. It depicts a young Parisian boy holding a pipe in his left hand and wearing a garland of flowers. John Hay and Betsey Whitney bought the painting in 1950 for \$30,000.

Sotheby’s called the work, which had a presale estimate of \$70 million, “one of the most beautiful of

the artist’s Rose Period paintings and one of the most important early works by Pablo Picasso ever to appear on the market.”

The previous highest-selling Picasso piece was “Woman with Crossed Arms,” a Blue Period painting done in 1901 and 1902, which sold for more than \$55 million in November 2000 at Christie’s. It was the fifth-highest auction price paid for a work of art.

“Boy with a Pipe” was part of a collection of major works by Picasso, Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas and others that headlined an auction of 34 paintings from a charitable foundation created by Betsey Whitney, a philanthropist, Sotheby’s said.

Also on the auction block was “Courses au Bois de Boulogne,” by Manet. Painted in 1872, it depicts a sunny day at the horse races and features a top-hatted figure in the lower-right corner that is thought to be Manet’s fellow racing enthusiast Degas. It



AP

This 1905 painting by Pablo Picasso titled “Garçon à la pipe” sold for \$104 million Wednesday, May 5, 2004 at Sotheby’s in New York.

sold for \$26.3 million.

The collection, which had a presale estimate of more than \$140 million, netted \$190 million. The proceeds will go to the Greentree Foundation—created in 1982 by Betsey Whitney following the death of her husband.

John Hay Whitney was editor in chief and publisher of The New York Herald Tribune from 1961 to 1966 and chairman of the International Herald Tribune from 1966 until his death. He also founded the venture capital firm of J.H. Whitney and Co. Betsey Whitney died in 1998.

RMS

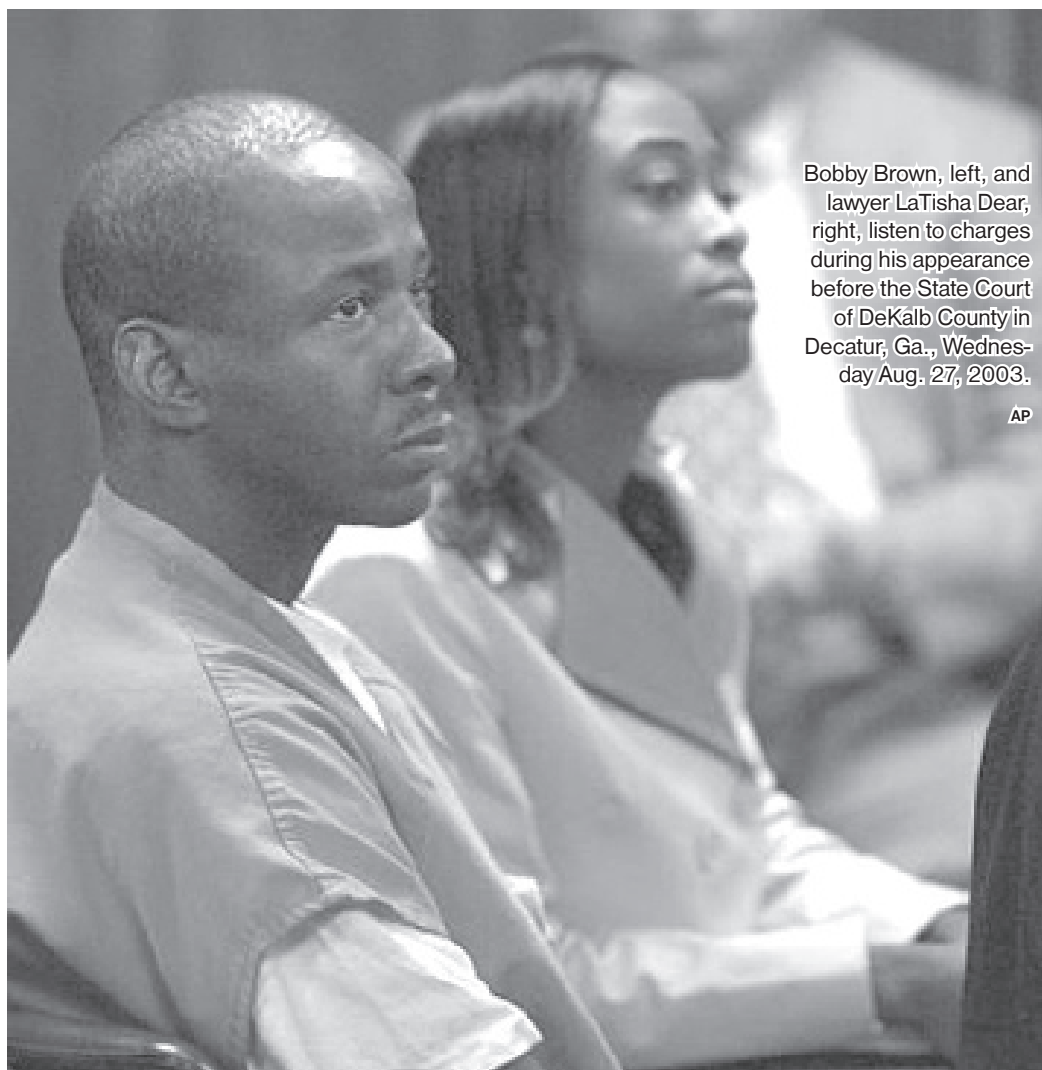
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Bobby Brown to stand trial for abuse



Bobby Brown, left, and lawyer LaTisha Dear, right, listen to charges during his appearance before the State Court of DeKalb County in Decatur, Ga., Wednesday Aug. 27, 2003.

AP

ATLANTA (AP)—R&B singer Bobby Brown was ordered to stand trial Wednesday on charges he hit his wife, fellow singer Whitney Houston.

Brown and Houston exchanged smiles during a 5-minute court hearing where Judge Barry Zimmerman ruled there was enough evidence to continue with the case against Brown.

The singer was ordered to turn himself in to authorities July 10 or 11 for fingerprinting when he would be released on a \$2,000 bond. The judge also warned Brown again having "violent contact" with Houston.

The couple left the courtroom walking arm-in-arm and made no comment to reporters and television cameras waiting outside.

Brown's attorney Maurice Bennett said the judge's decision was expected.

Simple battery is punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine. Normally on a first offense in domestic-violence cases, the charge is dismissed if the defendant undergoes counseling.

No date was set for when the case will be heard in state court. "It could be as much as a year down the road," said Lanny Lipsky, senior court clerk.

Houston called police Dec. 7 to report that Brown threatened to beat her "and then struck the left side of her face with an open right hand," a Fulton County police report said.

Brown addressed the report's specifics in an April interview with Dateline NBC, saying, "I got big hands, man. I would hurt her, you know? It would be more than just a little cut on the lip."

Brown further described the incident as a "little spat." He said the two were playfully "slap boxing" and Houston took one of his jabs a "little serious."

Houston's publicist in Los Angeles, Nancy Seltzer, did not return messages left by the Associated Press.

Brown has been jailed twice this year. In February, he spent a

month in jail for multiple probation violations before being released a month early for a March child-support hearing in Massachusetts. There, he spent another night in jail before paying a former lover more than \$60,000 in back child-support payments.

Brown and Houston have been married since 1992 and have a 10-year-old daughter, Bobbi Kristina.

On Tuesday, Brown fired his previous attorney, Vincent Dimmock.

Dimmock hadn't received any payments from Brown since February, when he began representing the singer. Dimmock would not say how much money was owed, the attorney said Wednesday.

"I sincerely wish him the best," Dimmock said.

LA to host 2004 Latin Grammy Awards

LOS ANGELES (AP)—After a one-year stint in Miami, the Latin Grammys will return to Los Angeles this fall.

"Hollywood called! Bringing the show to Los Angeles, one of the most culturally and musically vital cities in America, is a natural for the production of the Latin Grammy Awards," Gabriel Abaroa, president of the Latin Recording Academy, said Wednesday.

This year's awards ceremony is scheduled for Sept. 1. Nominations will be announced July 14.

Fifth porn actor tests positive for AIDS

LOS ANGELES (AP)—A fifth adult movie performer has tested positive for the AIDS virus in an outbreak that has halted most porn production in the multibillion-dollar industry, a nonprofit medical group announced Wednesday.

The porn actress had unprotected sex with HIV-positive actor Darren James, officials with the Adult Industry Medical Health Care Foundation said.

The woman's name was not released by the health foundation, but AVN, the industry's online magazine, said her manager confirmed it was a woman with the stage name Miss Arroyo.

Arroyo apparently contracted the virus March 30 while filming a scene with James, AVN said.

James contracted the virus in March while shooting a movie in Brazil, health officials said. Two other women who worked with him after his return to the United States also have tested HIV-positive.

About 50 people who performed with either James or those he worked with have been on a voluntary quarantine list that effectively prevents them from doing sex scenes until they have passed two more monthly HIV tests. Dozens of producers have shut down filming pending testing.

Meanwhile, a transsexual actor named "Jennifer" was diagnosed HIV-positive on Tuesday. That case was unrelated to the others, the health foundation said, because the actor had last

worked in February before the HIV outbreak and her partners did not work with anyone on the quarantine list.

The last HIV scare in the porn industry was in 1999 and involved only a single case.

The latest outbreak has prompted an investigation by the state's workplace safety agency and calls for state regulation of the largely self-regulating industry.

The California Assembly Health Committee shelved a bill Tuesday that would have required adult movie performers to use condoms and undergo testing for sexually transmitted diseases every two weeks.

The bill must undergo more study before it can be heard, the committee declared.

wallace

'Friends' song enriched Rembrandts—with consequences

By JOHN JURGENSEN
THE HARTFORD COURANT

The Rembrandts bear the burden of any one-hit wonder: A smash song brings mainstream fame, massive air play and a nice payday, then overshadows an entire career. Unlike most musical sensations, however, the Rembrandts' hit happened on television—and it still gets heard by millions almost every night.

"I'll Be There for You" lasts only 42 seconds. But for the Southern California band that recorded the near-minute of jangly guitars, cooing harmonies and hand claps that introduces the sitcom "Friends," the song has been an inescapable

soundtrack to the last decade.

The good news is, they're getting paid.

"Let me put it this way: I can't retire on it, but it's putting my kids through college," says Danny Wilde, 47, father of two, and musical partner to Phil Solem, the other half of the Rembrandts.

Every time that Monkees-esque ditty introduces "Friends," including the show's finale Thursday night, the Rembrandts earn a performer's fee. Not bad for a tune that had been largely written when the duo was brought in to polish and put music to it.

After "Friends" became a hit show in 1994, and fans started requesting the theme song from

radio stations, the money and air play that the Rembrandts earned came at a cost to their reputation. Especially when their record label awkwardly stitched a full-length version onto the end of the band's 1995 album, "LP."

"We were a little embarrassed," Wilde says. "We had a solid reputation as darlings of alternative radio. So it was hard to always hear, 'Hey, do you hang out with Courteney Cox? Are you and Ross buddies?'" (For the record, the answers are no.)

Eventually, "I'll Be There for You" came between them. Wilde and Solem steered clear of each other after 2000. "We felt a bit like we sold out. We

had no control over the direction where the Rembrandts were going," Wilde says.

But by now they have come to terms with their place in pop music history. They have also gotten back together to record (a new collection, "Choice Picks," is available on their Web site, rembrandts.com) and, of course, to play their signature song at performances during the week of the sitcom's final episode.

Wilde says he knows what to expect from audiences whose dedication to "Friends" outweighs their dedication to the band. "If so, you play (the song) up front and in the middle and then at the end. Then you play it again, backwards."

Girlfriend is eager to be wife but not stepmother

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

DEAR ABBY: I'm engaged to marry "Kurt" in August. He has a 3-year-old daughter, "Krystal," from his first marriage. We didn't meet until a month after his wife, "June," left him, so I'm not a home wrecker.

I moved in with Kurt several weeks after we began dating and have been cleaning his house, taking care of Krystal when she's here, doing his laundry, cooking for him—just like a wife would do.

Abby, June doesn't want Krystal. She remarried six weeks ago and has asked us to take her. June's husband is loud, mean and abusive, so I don't think it would be safe for Krystal to stay there.

My problem is I can't stand Krystal. She's a spoiled brat. I don't want to be a full-time mother, although at some point I'd like to have a child of my own.

I haven't told Kurt how I feel because I'm afraid he'd kick me out. Now I'm wondering if I should tell him I'm leaving before he sends me on my way. I don't think we can work this out because he loves Krystal, and I don't think he'd understand why I don't want to be her stepmother. What should I do?

—UNWILLING STEPMOTHER IN NEW MEXICO

DEAR UNWILLING: Level with Kurt, the sooner the better. Unless you can accept that he and Krystal are a package deal and learn to love her, to marry him would be a mistake and a disservice to all of you. That little girl has already struck out once in the mother department. Kurt needs a wife who is ready to embrace not only him, but also the child who will always be a high priority in his life.

DEAR ABBY: Our 20-year-old daughter was suspended from a small private university. We offered her tutors, lessons or a transfer to any number of other schools around the country to help her find the right field of study. She refused. She can do the work; she was just not motivated.

She now wants to attend a large university in another state to be near her boyfriend. We suspect that they want to live together. He smokes dope and lives on welfare, and this is unacceptable to us.

She says she's finally finding her backbone and becoming independent. We told her that being independent means assuming financial responsibility for oneself, and that we will no longer provide anything beyond medical and dental coverage for her. She thinks we're cutting the purse strings on her new "college lifestyle" because we don't like her boyfriend, which is true.

Are we being unreasonable? Also, any advice on the fastest way to get that oaf out of the picture would be appreciated.

MAD-AS-A-HORNET MOM IN VIRGINIA

DEAR MOM: Refusing to subsidize her "live-in" lifestyle is not being unreasonable. It's your money, and you can spend it—or not—as you see fit.

Let her know that as an adult, her choices are her own. If she chooses to get a job and work her way through school in order to be close to her boyfriend, that is her choice. It would be nice if she had a self-supporting, upwardly mobile love interest—but since she doesn't, and she's determined to live with him, she must pay the price.

As to the fastest way to get "the oaf" out of the picture, here's what NOT to do: Do not bad-mouth him. It will only make her defensive and drive them closer together.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Abby shares more than 100 of her favorite recipes in two booklets: "Abby's Favorite Recipes" and "More Favorite Recipes by Dear Abby." Send a business-size, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for \$10 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby — Cookbooklet Set, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Postage is included in price.)



Dear Abby

Viewers vote Huff off 'American Idol'

NEW YORK (AP)—Soulful singer George Huff was voted off "American Idol" by viewers Wednesday during a live broadcast, leaving four women as the show's final contestants.

Huff, 22, from New Orleans, performed "What a Wonderful World" and "Cheek to Cheek" during Tuesday's show, receiving lukewarm reviews from the judges.

Judge Randy Jackson said Huff's performance was "safe,"

while judge Simon Cowell said Huff sounded like he belonged on a cruise liner.

The three judges, including Paula Abdul, play an advisory role after helping winnow the field of 70,000 applicants to 32 semifinalists and then, with viewers, to 12 finalists. The audience takes charge from there until the winner is picked.

Huff, while popular, had been one of the bottom three vote-getters last week, when

red-headed crooner John Stevens was voted off.

He remained smiling and positive during Wednesday's show, his trademarks.

"Thank you so much, America," he said. "American Idol is my over-the-rainbow experience."

The four remaining contestants are all women - Jasmine Trias, Fantasia Barrino, Diana DeGarmo and LaToya London.

Barrino, 19, brought Abdul

to tears Tuesday night with her rendition of "What are You Doing the Rest of Your Life."

Barrino and London are obvious favorites, and Cowell praised their performances repeatedly.

"You and La Toya are in a different league," he said to Barrino.

The show, which airs Tuesday and Wednesday on Fox, boosted network ratings to third last week with 8.9 million viewers tuning in.

'Friends' finale to be released on DVD

LOS ANGELES (AP)—No need to tape that final episode of "Friends" for posterity—Warner Bros. plans to release a DVD of the finale just five days after its Thursday broadcast.

The series finale, which wraps up the NBC sitcom about six young adults living in Manhattan, is available by pre-order from the Warner Home Video Web site (\$9.95).

The disc includes the original pilot episode that introduced the characters of Monica, Chandler, Joey, Ross, Rachel and Phoebe nearly 10 years ago, along with exclusive behind-the-scenes material.

The show's hour-long conclusion airs Thursday on NBC at 9 p.m. EDT, preceded by an hour-long retrospective.



AP
Talk-show host Oprah Winfrey, center, poses with the cast of "Friends" for a taping of "The Oprah Winfrey Show" at the Bel Air Hotel in Los Angeles on April 19, 2004. Cast members from left are: Lisa Kudrow, Matthew Perry, Courteney Cox Arquette, Jennifer Aniston, Matt LeBlanc and David Schwimmer.

Cronkite to host MTV special on working

NEW YORK (AP)—MTV announced Wednesday that Walter Cronkite will be host of a special on employment issues facing young adults that will air May 25.

Previous generations knew the 87-year-old journalist as "the most trusted man in America," but many MTV viewers weren't alive when Cronkite signed off

as the "CBS Evening News" anchorman in 1981.

"With college graduation approaching and millions of young adults looking for work, we felt that it was important to put this issue in perspective for the MTV audience," said Dave Sirulnick, MTV's executive vice president of news and production. "The presence of Walter Cronkite in

the special will add gravitas and a historical perspective to this complex issue."

On the special, "MTV Choose or Lose: Work It," the network will follow five young adults as they compete for one entry level position. Through it, Cronkite will help explain such issues as underemployment, outsourcing and the growth of temp jobs.

Lennon memorabilia auctioned in London

LONDON (AP)—John Lennon memorabilia, including a leather collar he wore during the 1960s,

was auctioned by Christie's for a total of \$400,500.

The auction house called it the

"most significant collection of Beatles' memorabilia to come on the market in over 10 years."

The items included a colored felt-pen drawing by Lennon (\$17,800), a letter with his signature (\$9,800) and "Happy Fish," a pen-and-ink drawing (\$17,000).

But the two items that drew the highest bids Wednesday were a leather collar that Lennon wore in 1967 and 1968, which sold for \$178,000, and a custom-made Vox Kensington guitar used by Lennon and fellow Beatle George Harrison in 1967, also for \$178,000.

The Christie's auction also sold three items associated with other international stars. An early Elvis Presley U.S. concert poster sold for \$17,800, a Salvador Dali-inspired watercolor by Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols sold for \$2,850, and a poster from Jimi Hendrix's Experience concert sold for \$2,700.



Klum

Heidi Klum gives birth to baby girl

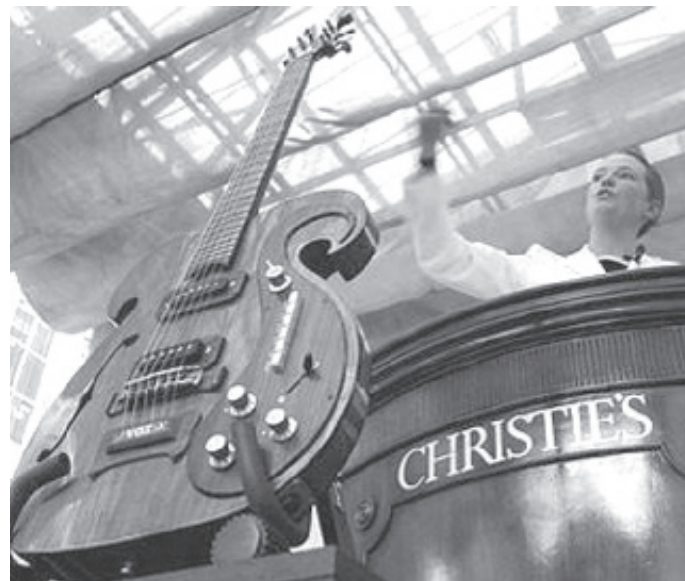
NEW YORK (AP)—Just in time for Mother's Day, Heidi Klum is a mom.

The 30-year-old German supermodel gave birth to daughter Leni in New York on Tuesday, according to her representatives.

On Klum's Web site, Leni was listed as weighing 3,750 grams, which is just over 8 pounds.

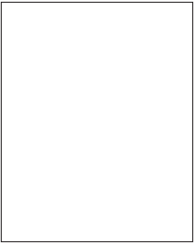
The baby's father is Flavio Briatore, managing director of Renault's Formula One team.

Klum, who has appeared in Sports Illustrated magazine's swimsuit issue, separated from her husband of five years, celebrity hairstylist Ric Pipino, in November 2002.



AP
A 1966 custom-made Vox Kensington guitar, which was given to Alexis Mardas by John Lennon is displayed in front of Helen Bailey a Christie's auctioneer as she takes bids for other unseen lots during a Pop music memorabilia sale at Christies auctioneers in London, Wednesday May 5, 2004.

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